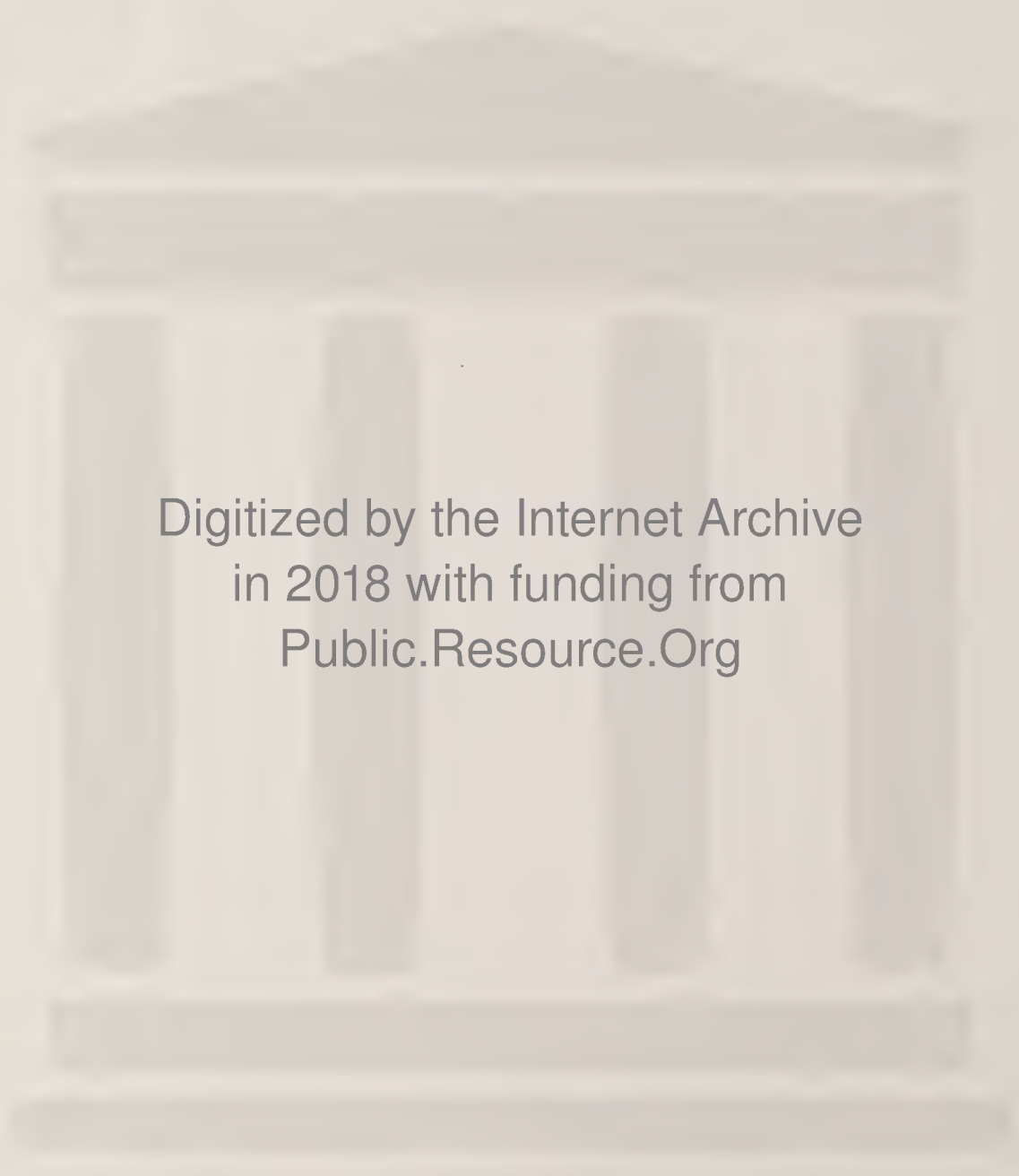

CHITTOOR V. NAGAI AH

A MONOGRAPH

K. N. T. Sastry



PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
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Preface

This is a study of Chittoor V. Nagaiah. Myriad are the facets of his personality. An actor, film-maker, music composer, singer — he was verily a cultural soldier who assiduously protected tradition, in the formative years of south Indian cinema. This concern for a cultural atavism was strengthened by his humanistic demeanour which consistently rejected commercial stances. The following pages will attempt to recreate the times which were instrumental in inculcating the traits of struggle and sacrifice, perseverance and perfection in Nagaiah.

It was only when I got wholly immersed in tracing the history of this great artiste, my inadequacies came to the fore. Here indeed was a great soul, whose commitment to humanistic approach was no less significant than his avowed artistic stances. Every plea for help met an answer. Every detail in his films was carefully crafted. It was this personality that I was looking into. The various aspects that came out during the course of my research would, in fact, make many volumes of reading material. Yet, within the limitations that I set to myself, I have tried to do justice to the life of the artiste.

First hand knowledge of the personality, by the sheer accident of contemporaneity is likely to make a study, at times, subjective in its analysis. Alienated from the culture of those 'good old days', a new generation looking at it, with awe, is likely to be spared of this trauma. I belong to this new generation. We live in the long rainbow of fast fading colours. Memories haunt us. Memories of Nagaiah. . . I vividly recall my grand-father raving about the song, *Pavanaguna Rama*. I remember how tears rolled down my cheeks when I saw the travails of Nagaiah as *Gumasta* , in a touring talkie. I was ten years old then. But by that time, Nagaiah had not only entrenched in the annals of Telugu cinema for over a decade and a half, he was already preparing to slowly fade into history. It was then to that age, an age which saw the *star* Nagaiah reign supreme, that I had to delve.

It is an acknowledged fact that Nagaiah's songs took music to the threshold of common man. This aspect of his personality warranted a special study. It was my good fortune that due to the opportunity provided by this work, I peeped into the world of yesteryears ' music, and have brought out a separate chapter on Nagaiah's music.

Over 300 films in Telugu, Tamil, and a few in Kannada and Hindi was a breathtaking spectrum. Nagaiah's greatest achievement, however, was *Thyagayya* — an analysis of which throws light on the film producer, actor, music composer and director : Nagaiah.

Endaro Mahanbhavulu (many are the great souls) — rhymes a Thyagaraya *Kirtana* — an all time favourite of

Nagaiah. Many indeed were the great souls who helped me in bringing this work to a shape. I have heavily drawn from Nagaiah's *Sviya Charitra* (autobiography) edited by Inturi Venkateswara Rao, for the biographical sketch. Dhanunjaya, V. A. K. Ranga Rao and Balanthrapu Rajanikantha Rao, during prolonged discussions helped me understand the music of Nagaiah. Mrs. Kamala Chandrababu talked to me about Nagaiah's personal life. And so did Satyam, noted film music composer, Kamalakara Kameshwara Rao and a host of others. Instead of reproducing the interviews with these personalities verbatim, I have sprinkled the variety of impressions, throughout the pages of this work.

I am thankful to the cooperation extended to me by Mr. Prasanna (of *Vijayachitra* - Dolton Publications, Chennai) and his staff; management of *Ananda Vikatan* who allowed me to spend hours in their library; P. J. Anandan besides providing me details of some of the films, gave me some stills. Hari Purushotham spent a lot of time discussing the draft of this book.

I am grateful to P. K. Nair of National Film Archive for giving me this opportunity to enter the fascinating world of yesteryear's movie - making. Finally, I express my gratitude to B. Narasinga Rao, film-maker, who has been a source of inspiration and guiding force towards perfection.

To all of them, I express my profound thank . . . *andariki naa vandanamulu*

Over to Nagaiah's life and times.

K. N. T. Sastry

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Chapter 1

Introduction

THE life and times of Chitoor Vuppuladadiyam Nagaiah is verily the story of the heights Telugu cinema reached and its descent into sheer commercialism. Nagaiah's entry marked film makers' concern turning towards the society around. Telugu talkie turned to realism at this stage. However it was left to Vauhini Pictures, which came into existence in 1939, to carry forward the banner of meaningful cinema. Nagaiah was a part of this epoch-making organisation.

The Golden Age of Telugu cinema, as it is called, has its beginnings here. However, the seriousness with which cinema tackled subjects of import came to a nought in late fifties when a new breed of producers introduced profit motivated cinema making. Precisely at this point of time Nagaiah's major acting career came to an end — as if by a coincidence.

Telugu cinema has its base in Theatre, for the early talkies were not very different from the plays of the day. Similarly

Nagaiah's involvement both with the theatre and its music were predominant in shaping the actor. Before the cinema, there was the theatre — theatre which marked the festivals of the community, with its inevitable presence. And the festivals were indeed the marking highlights of seasons. The theatre was the height of entertainment for all. The south Indian towns in the early decades of this century were witnessing visits of theatrical professionals, staging plays. Nagaiah as a young boy was obsessed with theatre. What were the plays that were presented ? Episodes from *Puranas* and an occasional parody of social manners. A mere spectator in Nagaiah slowly turned himself to become an active participant in the theatre.

The influence of the theatre remained with cinema for a long time. In 1921, Raghupati Venkayya offered his first silent feature film — the image had started moving. Telugu and Tamil talkies , only reflected the theatrical manners to begin with. More and more stage plays were transformed into celluloid stories. Talkies, in fact, did not enthuse intellectual circles. *Bharati* , a literary magazine in Telugu, condemned the advent of talkie as a " dangerous development fraught with grave consequences ".¹ Apparently this was a world phenomenon. Intellectuals apprehended that sound will drive the death knell into the craft of film making. Charles Chaplin, for instance, did not produce a talkie till as late as 1940.

Undeterred by criticism, mythologicals continued to sing and talk on the screen till about 1936, when Kritthiventi Nageshwara Rao of Indian Art Cinetone came out with his

Prema Vijayam which had a semblance of a social theme. *Gruhalakshmi* which launched Nagaiah exposed through the medium of celluloid, contemporary social problems. And then, there were songs which reverberated, the political upheavels of the day — songs, shorn of pedancy, were brought to the threshold of common man. And these changes saw the actor and singer Nagaiah find his roots.

Idealism, nationalism and a sacrificing tenor was running high in the stream of Indian polity. The greatest gift of this period of history was the cultural renaissance. Morals and ethics; humanistic outlook and a philanthropical nature were considered traits the public at large should espouse. The writings of Kandukuri Veereshalingam Panthulu, Gurzada Appa Rao, Subramania Bharatiar were being quoted everywhere. The cultural life of Indians was shaped by such writers into a receptive organ where ideals and ethics flourished. No wonder these stances reflected in the themes of films in the early period of film-making. H. M. Reddy infused patriotism in *Gruhalakshmi*, and C. Pullayya dealt with dowry problem in *Vara Vikrayam* — and then Vauhini Pictures took its birth.

B. N. Reddi's films reflected his refined taste. After successive disappointments and anxiety caused by his failures to get into movies, Nagaiah was lucky to get into the Vauhini stream. For him, there was no looking back since then.

Even as Vauhini's films tackled socially relevant subjects in *Sumangali*, *Devata*, intellectuals changed their attitude towards cinema. *Bharati*, the periodical which cautioned about

the advent of talkie, reconciled to the fact that films had come to stay. It started publishing several articles on the problems of film-making and stills of talkies. Gudavalli Ramabrahmam floated *Prajamitra . Telugu Talkie* edited by Muddu Krishna was contemplated upon. Intellectuals nursed a great hope on cinema. This was further evident when such periodicals as *Ananda Vikatan* (Tamil), *Ananda Vani* (Telugu) exhibited their concern about the film medium. An awareness was created. Cinema culture stretched its wings. It is into this kind of developing reception that Nagaiah entrenched himself. Vauhiniis were instrumental in turning the course of cinema towards newer paths. Nagaiah was the product of this milieu.

Nagaiah, the actor, is today considered synonymous with Saint Poets that he portrayed — *Vemana, Potana, Thyagayya, Ramadasu* . Looking back to the times of this actor, when he made such classics as *Thyagayya* , one cannot help envying the context of such films. These films portrayed individuals of yore, who were exemplary in their character, nay, very models of good living. They represented different paths to attain *Mukthi* (salvation). Till 1944 when *Bhakta Potana* was released by Vauhiniis, the major contribution of Nagaiah was in films which were resplendent with patriotic fervour. Artistes took pride in those days in their idealistic portrayals. The role of ' Panthulu ' assigned for Nagaiah in *Sumangali* was a replica of the respected social reformer, Kandukuri. B. N. Reddi stressed the need for reality in cinema. There was real love towards creativity. When film makers of this temperament indulged in

portraying Saint Poets' lives, once again this obsession with love for art came to the fore. Uncompromising in his attitude, Nagaiah learnt notes of traditional Carnatic music despite his sound background in the field, he himself having recorded a number of songs for HMV Gramophone Co., and no wonder critics raved that they saw a *Thyagayya* rendering his own composition on the screen ! The music of Nagaiah carved a niche for itself in the annals of Telugu cinema.

The musician in Nagaiah was a product of the age. Nagaiah's interest in music manifested at a very tender age. His stint in the theatre saw him practising singing. Later he turned to eke out his living through singing for HMV Gramophone Co. When he entered the films, Nagaiah shaped the stage-music, into popular music with his own innovations. It is no exaggeration to say that Nagaiah steered the music of Telugu cinema in its formative stages.

The spate of biographies that followed, were apparently the heirs of Prabhat Studios' influence on Telugu film makers. *Tukaram*, *Sant Dhyaneswar* and *Eknath* of Prabhat Studios might have willy-nilly influenced K. V. Reddy and Nagaiah, for the simple reason that Telugu biographies followed a pattern inasmuch as an amount of authenticity was brought into the films by sheer creativity, though the legends were not factual in detail. In Nagaiah, we had a Vishunpant Pagnis, for even like Prabhat Studios witnessing a landmark in the performance of Pagnis in *Sant Tukaram*, Nagaiah's *Bhakta Potana* was a turning point in his acting career. New Theatres

Hindi films used Bal Gandharva's singing capabilities to transmit the message of *ahimsa*, *satya* et al. Vauhini used Nagaiah's songs to convey the philosophy of rationalism in *Yogi Vemana*, earlier and pure poetry of Potana. Like *Sant Dhyaneswar* the life of a saint poet in *Bhakta Potana* is not flawless. The miracles attributed to Potana, and later to Vemana jar their characters. But like Prabhat's concern for 'fake cinematisation of available material,'² K. V. Reddy scripted *Yogi Vemana*, and Nagaiah wrote *Thyagayya* with available episodes.

The lyrical quality that was brought to *Thyagayya* is the greatest achievement of Nagaiah. The film brought traditional music to the common man in a platter — and he accepted it gracefully. Much later, in *Ramadasu*, Nagaiah's qualities manifested ; but then the film was outdated. Whether by economic circumstances or other compulsions, *Ramadasu* was released at a time when values were fast changing ; outlook of the people had undergone a transformation.

The *hybrid* in us may not digest the *desi* stuff of Nagaiah — nonethelss, it attracted people : for there was a charm in Nagaiah's voice. Today yet another *Thyagayya* or a *Ramadasu* or *Potana* cannot be recreated — for the saint poets of yore were biographed by producers, music composers, and actors of Nagaiah's ilk. His talents defy perfection by others.

But he was not merely a saint — all those films which saw him acting under B. N. Reddi's direction, or K. Ramnoth's *Ezhai Padum Paadu* and *Vidudalai* (both Tamil), and his own

own *En Veedu* (Tamil) introduced Nagaiah as a gentle and persuasive protagonist.

Nagaiah was the product of an age which gave credence to morality in life, puritanistic in its disposition. By late Fifties, commercialism took over the cinema and today materialism only matters. His traits were utterly misfit in an age which pooh — poohed idealism. Fast changing frames replaced Nagaiah — who graciously accepted the advent of change, but continued to be seen in minor roles. This was akin to Austrian film maker Eric Von Stronheim's portrayals, who after having presented masterpieces, was similarly seen in extra roles for other directors ! Nagaiah had to literally struggle to complete his film *Ramadasu* . He conceded victory to a gnawing sickness that was eating in to him in his ripe age. Kamala Chandrababu, recalls, " after a struggle, which went on for months, it was as if Nagaiah was aware of the end being near. He was ready to welcome death — for by starving his physical self, he hastened the end ". And when death did come, it was as if the entire Madras was at the funeral procession. One is forced to quote John Donne's adage : ' Death be not proud '.

Yet it was heart - rending to hear the stories of Nagaiah's financial difficulties. It was he who heralded the ' star - value ' into South Indian films, what with his commanding a remuneration of one lakh rupees for a film (this was immediately after ' Ashok Kumar '). It was he who is remembered as one who gave before asking. Many institutions and individuals alike received help from

Nagaiah. This philanthropic attitude to a great extent pauperised him.

But Nagaiah, for whom everything came late save for poverty, did not worry over such trivia as money. He was personification of dignity, indeed. Even like his mentor B. N. Reddi, Nagaiah found himself in an atmosphere charged with materialism in his later life, and receded into the background. While B. N. Reddi kept away from movie-making, disgusted with the changed conditions, Nagaiah, unfortunately could not help appearing on the screen, for the man who gave away to all the sundry, had not saved anything to support him in his old age. Pathetically enough, he continued to act till death overtook him.

Chapter 2

The Man

GOGUNUR, on the outskirts of Kuppam in Chittoor District is a small hamlet. Nagaiah was barely two years old, when he was brought by his grand-mother to this village, from Repalle where he was born on 28th March 1904 ¹. His father, Vuppuladadiyam Ramalinga Sharma was a small time revenue clerk in Repalle. During a visit to her son's house, Sharma's mother discerned the trying conditions in the family, and offered to take young Nagaiah with her, to Gogunur. Parents of Nagaiah were not very much disposed to accept this suggestion; but then, the old lady prevailed upon the couple to let her take the baby. In a matter of few years, Sharma wound up his establishment in Repalle, and returned to his native village, Gogunur.

Nagaiah grew up in an environment of orthodoxy and poverty, where ritualistic baths in the early morning hours to the chant of Vedic hymns, ' gurukula' schooling and lessons in

music at nightfall became daily chores. His father, now a temple discourser (harikatha vidwan) had started life anew in Kuppam. The artiste is a human being and this makes him very vulnerable inasmuch as he is ridden with the tendency to imbibe in his art all that he has seen, felt and learnt in the course of growing up. A product of this rural culture, though poverty conditions in the household were veiled from Nagaiah's eyes blissfully by that wonderful screen called boyhood, it was natural for the youngster to develop an attitude which was akin to atavism; he was by nature tradition-oriented, thanks to his upbringing.

The notes of music seem to have run in the genealogy of Sharma. Recognising young Nagaiah's inclinations, Sharma dutifully put him to further his music lessons with Chittoor Peraiah Pillai, who taught him the ascending and descending notes of music. Music might aesthetically please a person: it cannot fill the stomachs though . ' Harikathas ' were not enough to meet both the ends and the family migrated to Chittoor hoping against hope that a new place would bring them better days. Nagaiah, however, did not get distracted by the change of place — his pursuit of rhythms continued. In the inner layer of his conscience the imprints of the times might have left deep marks, for in his later life his philanthropic outlook seems to have its roots in the pangs of wants, his family always faced.

Nagaiah considered every artiste a human being, and every human being an artiste ² . He strongly believed that every branch of art should promote prosperity to the world around and

in the same breath his expectation that art should become a tool of change betrayed his idealistic stance. This idealistic attitude must have had its foundations in Nagaiah's childhood which saw a great amount of financial difficulties.

Nagaiah joined a school in Chittoor. Not many had an inkling of the dreams that the boy was nurturing in his heart. They were manifesting, however, now and anon. When years advance, he started visiting neighbouring towns — with a new set of friends, often pinching a few ' annas ' for the ticket to the theatre, from the household. Nagaiah grew up in a bilingual town. He never tried to distinguish Telugu from Tamil plays, when it came to choosing. What mattered was, his presence in the fore whenever a drama troupe visited Chittoor or its neighbourhood. This ritualistic attention to the stage was, of course, at the expense of his studies. Nagaiah's talent in singing was put to test when an opportunity came out of blue. He was literally pushed on to the stage by his school headmaster, when the boy-actor playing the role of ' Bhakta Prahalada ' in the visiting Surabhi Nataka Mandali's troupe, suddenly took ill. His performance on the stage brought him praise from the headmaster. Willy-nilly, Nagaiah made his first public appearance on the stage.

The theatre was the only entertainment to the people in those days. Dramatic troupes used to shift from town to town, village to village, often timing their visits to the festivals and village fairs. Men, women and children used to flock to this medium when it was festival time — but orthodoxy being what it was, many Brahmin conservative families used to consider even this form of

entertainment as a taboo. Nagaiah unmindful of the background from which he was hailing, forayed into the theatre. Soon it was to become an obsession with him. The parents were irked at this kind of waywardness, which they felt was detrimental to the boy's studies. They packed him off to Tirupati in a bid to wean him away from his interest. But the artiste in Nagaiah would not take a back seat. Instead of concentrating on books, Nagaiah became an active member of 'Saraswati Vilas Gana Sabha', now taking up minor roles. Parents confirmed him as a useless fellow, and brought him back to Chittoor. Nagaiah was already on the threshold of turbulent adolescence. The need for a few extra rupees was being felt dearly in the family. Sharma, with the fond hope that his son could earn those few rupees, put him on to Teacher Training Course. Soon he was a teacher in Chittoor. But, was he? A round peg in a square hole, passers by commented that the school classes have been turned into dramatic troupes! The lure of the theatre was so strong in him, that it would take him away for days together, at times indulging him in queer acts.

On one occasion when S. G. Kittappa was rendering a song on the stage, the spectator Nagaiah went running to fetch a coconut which he broke at the feet of the artiste, paying his tribute. This love led him to Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer at Kanjeevaram, where he furthered his music lessons. Academic life bored the young man. He was just not made to be a teacher. — maybe a preacher, yes, in his later life! Sensitive music lover that he was, when Bellari T. Raghavacharya visited Madanapalli to stage his English play,

' Othello ' , he recited, a few songs to receive appreciation from the noted artiste. Cuttamanchi Ramalinga Reddy encouraged the enthusiasm of the young man and asked him to continue his music lessons. Meanwhile, an opportunity came his way. He was offered the role of Chitrangi in ' Saranghadhara ' play. The troupe was : Surabhis. Nagaiah accepted the offer — albeit a female role. Even as these ventures into theatre continued, the need for money was increasingly felt in the house. Hopping from a clerical job (he had by now said good bye to his teacher's job), to a police constable's post, he tried his hand at wielding the lathi. Apparently, the horse on which he was asked to perch, as a cop, knew the unfit person on its back and it brought him down. Nagaiah literally leapt away from this job, though bruised.

An English official had descended on Chittoor for a temporary stay. Nagaiah was attracted by the strange notes of music emanating from his bungalow. He became a regular listner, albeit from outside the gate. He was invited into the bungalow and soon he was bartering his knowledge of Indian music to the Western piano. The Englishman suggested to a visiting elderly person, whether he has a daughter and if so why not marry her off to Nagaiah. The visitor jumped at the idea. It was agreed between the parents that Nagaiah would visit the village. A date was finalised. Did the girl know of Nagaiah's obsession with music — we do not know ! When she invited the visitors with a melody, *Nannu Paalimpa Vacchitiva*, the alliance was confirmed. The first flush of marriage took young

couple on a visit to Nellore. Nagaiah met a wee bit of professional luck too. Nagaiah approached Bellari Raghavacharya who was camping in Nellore, and was given an important role of Kabir in *Ramadasu* play.

There appeared to be no looking back from this entry on to professional theatre-acting. Back in Chittoor, during the lean period of his theatre-acting, Nagaiah busied himself on shaping his dream — launching his own play, " Sri Krishna Leelalu ". when he was thus busy with acting for others and shaping his own troupe , however a stroke of bad luck brought the news of his wife's death. After having lived with her husband Nagaiah, for only two years, she had passed away after a child-birth. The female child also did not survive for long. Nagaiah's father implored upon him to remarry. This girl, Girija, also happened to be a good music lover and herself a singer.

As an adolescent his love for the theatre had put a stop to his studies. Slowly as he formed his own dramatic troupe, his own disadvantages of this dawned upon him. Every time the troupe members indulged in English conversation, he felt cheated. His inadequacy came to the fore. To get over the situation, he decided to obtain a formal degree. This decision took him to Prof. Subramaniam in Madras, who encouraged the boy, ' Yes , verily, you can get a degree through external studies'. This longing to learn exposed him to the world of literature. The visits to Madras also became frequent. He developed acquaintance with Srinivasa Iyengar, a father figure of

Freedom Movement.

Much indeed was happening in the entire country. Southern parts of the country were proving that they were not lagging behind in raising the banner against English Colonial rule. The struggle had achieved an intensity. Idealism was a model for many a young person of the period. Writings of social reformers like Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu, who advocated widow marriages, educational avenues to women, social awakening were becoming veritable bibles to younger generation. Nagaiah's exposure to this literature made him react in a very constructive way. He attended Gauhati Session of the Congress Party in 1926. On his return he was pleased to know that he had passed his B. A. Degree, but the anti - English sentiment was so high in him that Nagaiah decided to keep away from the convocation : the reason being that he was getting his degree in English. Patriotism took deep roots in Nagaiah, inasmuch as it lived with him, at times weakning his financial position.

Much later, in 1966, when Nagaiah had seen the best and worst facets of his life, commented in an article : " To us India was a dreamland. A country which was the very manifestation of ' sujalam , suphalam, malayaja seetalam'. Is the country same today? It is painful to even agree that it is not. Selfishness and avraciousness have become the *sine qua non* for succeeding in life. Everything is viewed and guided through materialistic returns. . . " ³

A metamorphosis had taken the youngman by its stride, towards meaningful contribution to the society around. This

became evident when Nagaiah came forward to arrange and organise agitators' squads when Salt Agitation was launched in Madras.

These activities increasingly saw Nagaiah staying in Madras for prolonged periods. He was a member of a variety of organisations like 'Suguna Vilas Sabha', which took him as a stage artiste, to many a town; he was introduced to the Indian Fine Arts Society, which was staging a number of Telugu plays in Madras and finally an important membership in Chennapuri Andhra Maha Sabha brought him acquaintance of B. N. Reddi who was then studying auditing in Madras. Soon, this was to turn into a friendship, with both of them addressing one other as 'brother'; Nagaiah was being slowly drawn into the vortex of professional associations. Nagaiah found in Madras a very receptive city to his inclinations. A chance visit of Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Panthulu, whose daily *Andhra Patrika*, was a prestigious organ of the Madras intellectual circle, to one of Nagaiah's plays brought Nagaiah an offer from him to work as *Patrika's* correspondent. The extra money that this job brought him was very welcome. Things were seemingly rosy. The thorn of ill luck was waiting to sting him, though. News came of his wife having passed away after a miscarriage. Nagaiah was barely 23 years when he had lost his second wife. Girija was a darling of the household. Even as Nagaiah used to be away for prolonged periods, in his bouts of stage-acting and freedom movement participation, his father Sharma had found in this girl, a son-and-daughter rolled into one. Her slokas, even as she read out them from scriptures with an amount of melody, became a must

every evening for the old man. Passing away of such a dear soul was an unkind cut . . . On the first monthly ritual (masika) after her death, Sharma also breathed his last. The twin-tragedies in the house shook Nagaiah. Seeking solace, Nagaiah left for Ramanashramam.

Even as Nagaiah was trying to drain his pathos in the sprawling Ramanashramam campus, a visitor from his native town, Chittoor, chanced upon him, wondering what this young man was upto. Dorai (of Dorai & Company), gave him details of the travails at the home front, even as Nagaiah is away at this Ramanashramam for a prolonged period. Nagaiah's mother virtually was on the streets. Dorai pressurised Nagaiah to return to Chittoor and put to use his singing talent. He helped him get regular recording assignments from the Gramophone Company, and this indeed turned out to be a good tidings. He drowned his sorrows in music, but the greatest benefit came in the form of his developing contacts with music pundits. Panchangam Ramanujacharyulu, Uppuloori Sanjiva Rao, Semmangudi, Subbaiah Bhagavathar, K. B. Sundarambal — all were now his colleagues. M. S. Subbulakshmi, a 11-years prodigy then, was already recording for the Gramophone Company.

Though these recording assignments were bringing him a regular flow of income, his mind was now keen on talkies. The movies had just then begun to talk. Prolonging his stay in Madras, he started knocking the doors for an opportunity.

Opportunities did not come his way. Those that appeared to be on his laps, were being missed by him. Madras was in the

grip of filmmaking activity. Jiten Banerjee, Y. V. Rao, Ch. Narasimha Rao, Prakash, K. Subramanyam were all feverishly working to launch their talkies. Nagaiah looked upto these doyens. Armed with a letter from B. Muniswamy Naidu, a political personage of considerable import in Madras Presidency, he approached Srinivasan, editor of *THE HINDU*, who had launched his South Indian Film Corporation. His recordings for the Gramophone Company had taken him away to Bangalore, where Nagaiah was recording stage plays. By the time Nagaiah returned and met Srinivasan, he was informed that artistes have already been finalised. Nagaiah took this disappointment in his stride, but did not keep quiet. He took a letter from Sir M. Visvesvaraya, a distant relative, and approached Dadasaheb Phalke, to get some training in talkies. Phalke put him on to the editor's table. Nagaiah was not very much impressed. He was destined to be an artiste — not a technician. He returned to Madras, without completing his 'training'.

A series of missed opportunities kept Nagaiah away from entering the filmdom, for over seven years ever since the talkie was first released in Telugu. P. V. Das had assured him a role in his *Maya Bazar* — again, another Gramophone Company call took him away, depriving him of the chance. He was just unable to disregard the recordings, for they were his bread. P. Pulliah fresh from Kolhapur was to direct *Sarangadhara* for Star Combines, and Nagaiah was slated to act in his film. Again, as luck would have it, a death in the family took him away from

Madras. Next it was K. Subramanyam, who called him for a stint in Calcutta. However, heeding the advice of a friend to stay back to act in his film, which never went on to sets, Nagaiah missed this opportunity. Successive setbacks depressed the artiste. These abortive attempts to enter the films were followed by a bitter incident, which virtually took Nagaiah on to the streets. The incident also betrays the gullibility in Nagaiah's personality — a streak which was responsible for many a financial loss for him. A scheming Pillaiar posed as a businessman from Ceylon and offered a partnership deal. Nagaiah had just then received a 'legacy' from his father's life insurance policy. The duo went ahead with selection of artistes, finalising the script (the film was to be named, *Nara Narayana*), and of course spending every pie that Nagaiah had. One fine morning Pillaiar bolted from the scene, albeit with an assurance that he would first send money through his bank and then return with more money. Nagaiah's visit to Bank revealed the fraud that was played upon him. Nagaiah, now having spent all that he had, had to take the ravages of the association by abandoning his rented house, entering a slum.

It was a serious period of introspection for Nagaiah. Was he not cut-out for the Cinema? A couple of months ago he was all set to launch a film — today he is an unemployed pauper. What will happen to his dreams? It was at this period of desperation that the news of launching Rohini Pictures reached him. Stalwarts like H. M. Reddy, B. N. Reddi, K. Ramnoth, Shekar, Parepalli Sessaiah, Pasupuleti Kannamba

were to produce *Gruhalakshmi*. They had finalised the hero (Sri Ramanujachari), heroine (Kannamba), and the vamp (Kanchanamala). A keyrole of a patriot was still undecided. H. M. Reddy was considering Parepalli Satyanarayana for this role. The Tiger of the Talkie, as he was called, H. M. Reddy was no person to accept suggestions from any quarter. However, B. N. Reddi's hint that Nagaiah would suit the role, was instantly accepted by H. M. Reddy. This was a surprise development. At last, seven years of effort saw Nagaiah acting in *Gruhalakshmi*. The year was 1938.

Late thirties were vibrant with the spirit of idealism in every walk of life. Film makers were naturally charged with twin forces of nationalism and patriotism. Many artistes took pride in their idealistic stances. They considered it as a matter of duty, to promote widow - marriages, intercaste marriages, and other social reforms. *Gruhalakshmi* reverberated the period - flavour. Though Nagaiah was not the hero of the film, his role as Gopi, a patriot, gave ample chance to bring into full play the ideals which Nagaiah had considered very valuable. And then, there were the songs. To the music of Prabhala Satyanarayana, at least two of his songs became instant rages. Nagaiah's rendering of " Kallu Manandoyi " and " Lendu Bharata Veerulara ", were oozing with patriotic fervour. In *Gruhalakshmi*, Nagaiah's debut saw at a single stroke the satisfaction of furthering his ideological stance through the film medium, and on the other hand getting immense sense of fulfilment by clinching the opportunity to sing a few patriotic songs.

1939, only a year later, H. M. Reddy, known for his least botheration to maintain details of expenditure, parted B. N. Reddi. However, with an avowed objective of furthering meaningful cinema, with other stalwarts in his Company, B. N. Reddi held aloft the banner of his new filmmaking unit Vauhini. Nagaiah became a part of this Vauhini Pictures. In fact, the unit had its office in Nagaiah's cottage.

Vauhini's maiden film *Vanademataram*, launched the music composer, Nagaiah. He was also the hero of the film. Despite its tall sounding title, the film was set in domestic milieu. Long years of his stage exposure and experience in stage music reflected in the songs composed by Nagaiah for *Vandemataram*. When all were seemingly breezy, the very next film of Vauhini's *Sumangali* had a surprise in store for Nagaiah. B. N. Reddi assigned him the role of an old Pantulu, modelled on social reformer Veereshalingam Pantulu, though. The naivety in Nagaiah was encashed by certain friends of his at this point of time. He was spurred and abetted by them that he believed Vauhini's are fast making him a stereotype of an old man. These remarks were working in his mental make-up, when with the permission of Vauhini's he accepted a light role of a quixotic film maker in Y. V. Rao's *Viswa Mohini* (1940). He entered Tamil filmdom through *Ashok Kumar*.

At about this time, some of the weaknesses — well, if those can be called as weaknesses — in Nagaiah's personality raise head as the demand for the actor is steadily increasing.

That Nagaiah was naïve at many a time, almost gullible to believe the words of his so-called friends at their face value, is a matter beyond dispute. Naivety was clearly evident when he lost considerable amount by dealing with that Ceylonese businessman. This streak again rose its head inasmuch as despite the fact that Vauhini's are providing him every chance to come up, Nagaiah felt cheated when he was cast in the role of an old man. Though Vahini's *Devata* saw him again acting the heroic role, the very next movie slated for him was *Bhakta Potana* (1944). On the one hand peculiar circumstances during *Devata* forced him to marry Jayalakshmi, who was a student residing in Nagaiah's house on the other hand the announcement of *Bhakta Potana* intrigued him. Though, Nagaiah admits that he was yearning for this role, he was afraid that the stereotype image of an old man is being indeed confirmed. As if to erase this impression, and heeding the advice of his friends, he launched own film production unit, naming it as *Renuka Films*. Assigning P. Pulliah to direct the film on his behalf, he called upon Bhimavarapu Narasimha Rao to compose music for the film. Naturally, he reserved the role of a romantic hero for himself. *Bhagyalaxmi* was the product of Nagaiah's ambition to hold fast to the image of a hero.

Whatever be the feelings of Nagaiah towards accepting the role of Saint Poet *Bhakta Potana*, the film proved to be a turning point in Nagaiah's career. The film makers in South were greatly impressed by the successful ventures in North

which portrayed many Saint poets on the screen. Taking a cue from them, K. V. Reddy was assigned by Vauhini to direct *Bhakta Potana*. Primarily being a biography of a saint, the film provided ample opportunity to display talents in music composition and singing, for Nagaiah. True to his apprehensions, the image of a saint stuck to him — for, he himself launched his second film, *Thyagayya*. On the heels of *Thyagayya* after a social, *Swargaseema*, Vauhini assigned Yogi Vemana's role to Nagaiah. These films sealed the imprint of an ascetic on Nagaiah, which none could erase. Indeed his name became synonymous with these saints.

In venturing his own production, Nagaiah took the mantle of wielding the megaphone for *Thyagayya*, apart from playing the titular role, and composing music. Commercialism was not the serious consideration of film makers in those years, even as they paid attention towards aestheticity of their work. This idealism was fore in Nagaiah. While *Thyagayya* brought him laurels, it also saw him flooded with material wealth. He was now earning well in the Tamil film land too. The ease which material wealth brought saw Nagaiah's predisposition towards philanthropy raise its head. He was continuously being approached by political personalities who did not bat an eyelid before asking for favours — but then in meeting their demands, he at times acted beyond his capability. Kamala Chandrababu, his sister-in-law recalls, Nagaiah had to run to Marwari moneylenders when such personalities visited and he had no ready cash to part with. The habit of seeking loans

was thus becoming manifest. Nagaiah himself made it a habit to visit the freedom fighters in jails with jeepful of flowers and fruits, to listen to their woes, which invariably meant draining his purse.

Apart from this disposition towards charity, his career/ambition also was responsible to lead him into difficulties. He had bought a vast acreage of land (52 acres) in Kodambakkam. Some time-servers advised Nagaiah to establish his own studio. Unmindful of the consequences of such a move, Nagaiah embarked on a spree of spending money by ordering equipment paying advances, et al. B. N. Reddi came to know of this and tried to enlighten some facts about studio running. But it was late. Nagaiah had already spent money. Apparently clouds of bad-times were hovering on his head. A friend who had bamboozled him to sign a surety, suddenly vanished and Nagaiah was called upon to pay for him. His land, which came to him in dizzying speed, vanished in equally break-neck momentum. Nagaiah was able to bear the losses, for he was by now a ' star'. Films were being signed one after another. There was a regular flow of money to his coffers. Being no hoarder of material wealth, he did not know what was happening. He was getting money and equally he was spending. Commenting on this streak in Nagaiah's personality, B. N. Reddi, who was verily Nagaiah's friend, philosopher and guide, laments : " If only this person had cultivated the talent that was given to him by the Almighty and concentrated to further his knowledge in music, he would have been another *Thyagayya*. But then even like Gods

schemeing to spoil the penance of ascetics, many great artistes are ridden with some weaknesses . . . taking them away from their goals "4.

The year 1950 saw him doing Ramnoth's magnum opus, *Ezhai Padum Paadu*. The loss of wealth was compensated by the popularity that this film earned for him. He was adjudged the Best Actor by the Motion Pictures Academy of Madras. These happenings lulled him into a sense of false security. He refused to learn lessons from his losses. Embarking on the production of another film, he gave reins to production executives who literally ran amock with Nagaiah's money tricking him to the belief that despite the very good response *En veedu* received not a pie of profit came. Even this experience did not drive a lesson or two, for the simple reason, Nagaiah was still reining supreme in Tamil and Telugu. In 1953 as many as 6 films were released. It was as if he was at the zenith of his career. In 1954, another crop of 6 films hit the screen. In the same year *Vidudalai*, under K. Ramnoth's direction hit the screen. The film saw, however, the swan song of Nagaiah's major acting career. But what happened to him to slide so suddenly? His autobiography becomes suddenly silent over this aspect. The years 1950-54 saw Nagaiah's extraordinary popularity both as an actor and singer. He was extensively seen in Tamil films also. The earnings from these proved a buffer for the losses he suffered through his own production. *En Veedu*, despite turning out to be a classic, fared well. " But then, my partner who had promised to give me 50 per cent from the proceeds did not part with even a pie. Once again, I was

cheated " — observes Nagaiah.⁵

In the south Indian film world, a new star system was making its presence felt. Values were changing. Nagaiah himself was entering middle age. Evidently Nagaiah did not pay heed to these changing circumstances. In spite of monetary setbacks, he announced his ambitious project — filming the biography of yet another saint composer, " Ramadasu ". *Kinema* (Telugu - Sept. 1954,), carried this interesting report : " Mahalakshmi films present — " Ramadasu ". Nagaiah is presently busy with the script writing for this new biography ".

However it took a decade for Ramadasu to see the light of the day. In the ark tunnel of its production, we see the travails of a film-maker — as acknowledged by Nagaiah himself, " It was as if I was destined to undergo the travails which Ramadasu himself was subjected to ". Over a period of decade, a loved and respected film personality of Nagaiah's stature could not raise money to complete his film. From where will the funds come ? money lenders . . . ? Yes, to an extent. Right from late fifties to early sixties, Nagaiah condescended into acting small roles. Money thus raised saw the film-maker spending on furthering the picturisation of Ramadasu. The vortex into which he had placed himself drew him to the nadir. He was impoverished.

Producers were unkind to such an extent that they too exploited him. Loans had overtaken the artiste — overwhelmed him. He had to complete *Ramadasu*. The marwaris took his

signature and wrote double the amount on the dotted line of promissory notes. The distributors wrote off the negative rights in their favour. Yet Nagaiah continued to take money for the film. For money was just not enough. Nagaiah himself was soon finding that he was losing time. Satyam recalls, " After his assignment, Mohammed Rafi was expecting to be paid. Nagaiah presented flowers and fruits and pleaded his inability to pay ". The film received President 's Medal. It was dubbed into Tamil as *Bhakta Ramadasu*, but Nagaiah was to get no returns.

In 1965, Nagaiah was honoured by Government of India with ' Padmashri ' title. Nagaiah was continued to be seen till almost his death. Satyam recalls, " Even as he was in his death bed, there were film producers asking him to do just that role of sick man for their film to adjust his obligations ". Financially, he was apauperised ; physically as well, his health was deteriorating.

Sri Sri, writing in his autobiography *Anantam* ⁶, recalls, " the life of a cine star need not be comfortable always. Nagaiah having earned so much, died in very dear circumstances ".

Nagaiah was the representative of that Golden Age of South Indian Cinema when film makers indulged in movie making with an amount of commitment towards Art. With the artistes of his ilk dissolving in the background, everything came to be viewed with the glasses of ' returns '. To this milieu Nagaiah was a stranger. For him the Saint Poet's life Ramadasu was important than the troubles and travails

that he would be led into by signing promissory notes. He had given away, without a consideration for the future all his earnings — a visitor to Nagaiah's household did never return empty handed. Political leaders, co-artistes, friends all had their fingers dipped in the pie prepared by Nagaiah. When time came, save for his name, there was nothing to stand by his side. With a deteriorating health, Nagaiah was verily the renouncer that he was in *Vemana*. About a month before his death, he gave up intake of solid food. Once when his wife Jayalakshmi was preparing him to take to the physician, a friend peeped into the house. Nagaiah had a chat with the visitor. Slowly limping his way into Jaya's room, he said " Look, now that I'm all right, why should we go to the doctor . . give me those twenty-five rupees. Poor fellow seems to be in trouble. It will help him to an extent". This incident sums up the charity that used to flow from Nagaiah's hand.

In a disturbing moment of introspection Nagaiah wrote, " Having played my part, I am in a position which is . . . well, if I die today, may be someone have to raise contributions to dispose of my corpse ". No, this pessimism is certainly not typical of Nagaiah. His world was full of optimism. In the same breath he said, " If only, I appeal for help, my Tamil and Telugu admirers will shower money. . . so that I would no more be bothered about these trivia". A true artiste never shares his pathos with his admirers. He distributes the goodness that the art provides. Nagaiah never appealed. The admirers were not in the know of his circumstances. When

he died on December 30, 1973, it was as if the entire Madras city was on the roads to pay farewell to this cultural soldier.

Chapter 3

The Actor

TELUGU and Tamil talkies had their beginning in the very year 1931, when sound was heard with the Indian moving image. Concentrating on mere conversion of stages-plays into moving pictures, divorced of aesthetic qualities, the talkie remained in a, as if, hybernation period at this stage. To a question in an interview with "Ananda Vikatan", H. M. Reddy, who brought the first Talkie into both Tamil and Telugu languages identified the malice in these words, "The main reason for Tamil films going berserk appears to be in the fact that there is nothing in the stories that the film makers present"¹. The year — 1938. As if to set right the conditions that were plaguing the South Indian Cinema, Renuka Films came into existence. K. Subramaniam brought out *Seva Sadanam* in the same year. H. M. Reddy himself took over the megaphone to bring a socially relevant film to Telugu audience. Thanks to B. N. Reddi who was a member of this

unit, Nagaiah found himself acting in this film which took out cinema from the morass of mythologicals.

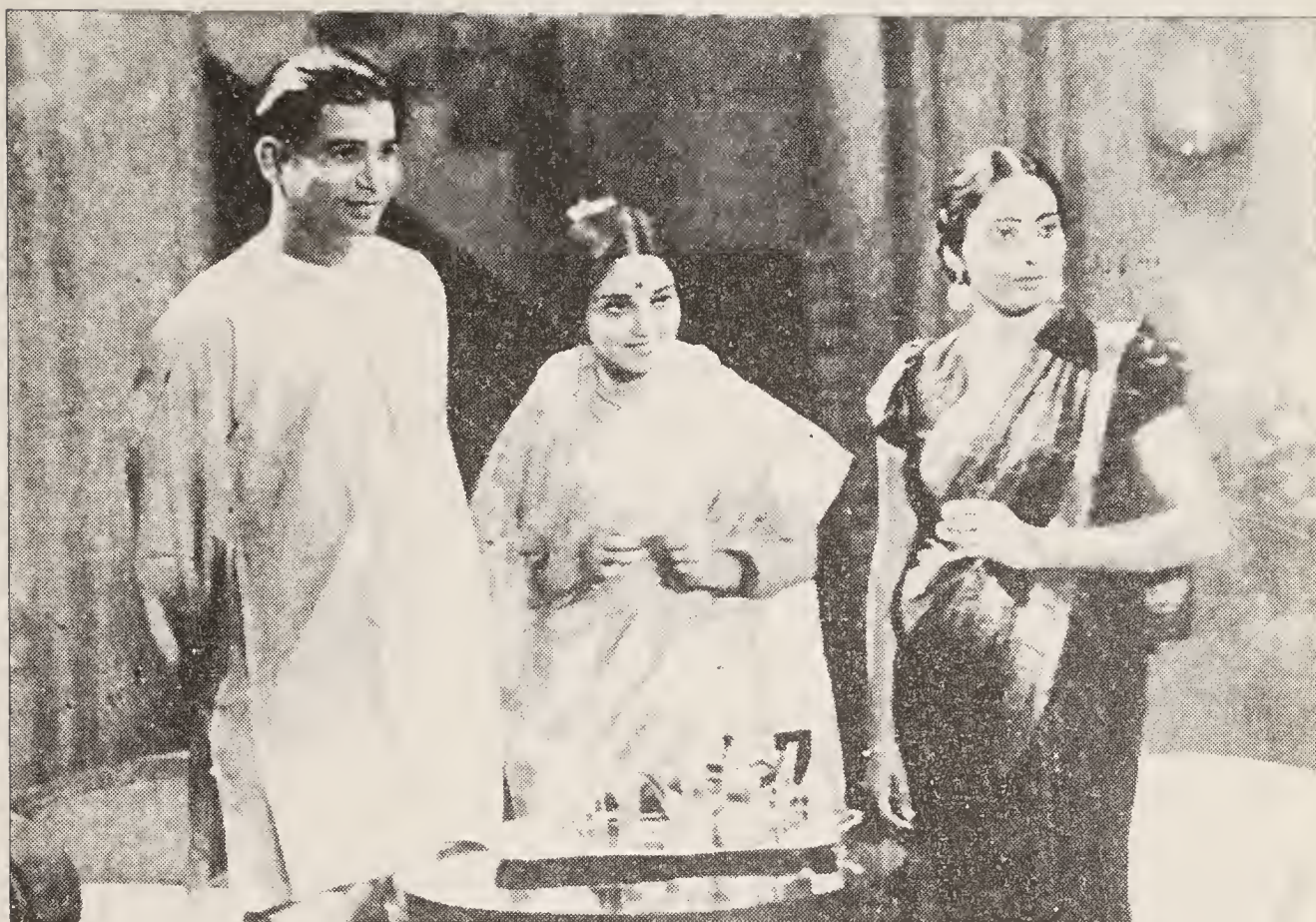
The period itself was tumultuous. Political scene in the country was fast changing with Mahatma Gandhi's accentuated efforts to seek freedom from the colonial rule. There was an air of expectation and revolt. Education had opened the doors, albeit to a few in those years, towards progressive and enlightened thought. Intellectuals were concentrating on the problems of the milieu around. This was amply reflected in Gopi's character which Nagaiah portrayed in his maiden film. The story itself was a sentimental clap-trap of a wayward husband and faithful wife with a vamp thrown in to excite the audience. The director, H. M. Reddy, however had succeed in infusing patriotic fervour through Gopinath. Nagaiah was Gopinath in the film.

Clad in a Gandhian head-gear, shouldering a tricolour flag, we see Nagaiah campaigning in remote villages with his patriotic songs. Immediate topicality apart, in Nagaiah's role the audience found a rallying point. Reminisces Nagaiah : " B. N. Reddi helped me to come out of theatrical mannerisms, for facing a camera was different from facing the theatre audience ". The scene in which the doctor brother-in-law slaps Nagaiah's face when he advices the drunkard to see the end of the dark tunnel and eschew drinking , is an example. The actor brings great flexibility in his facial movements. That Nagaiah could cheat his age — he was 29 when he entered the filmdom — speaks of the skill he used to bring into his acting. Inturi Venkateswara Rao recalls : " Nagaiah met

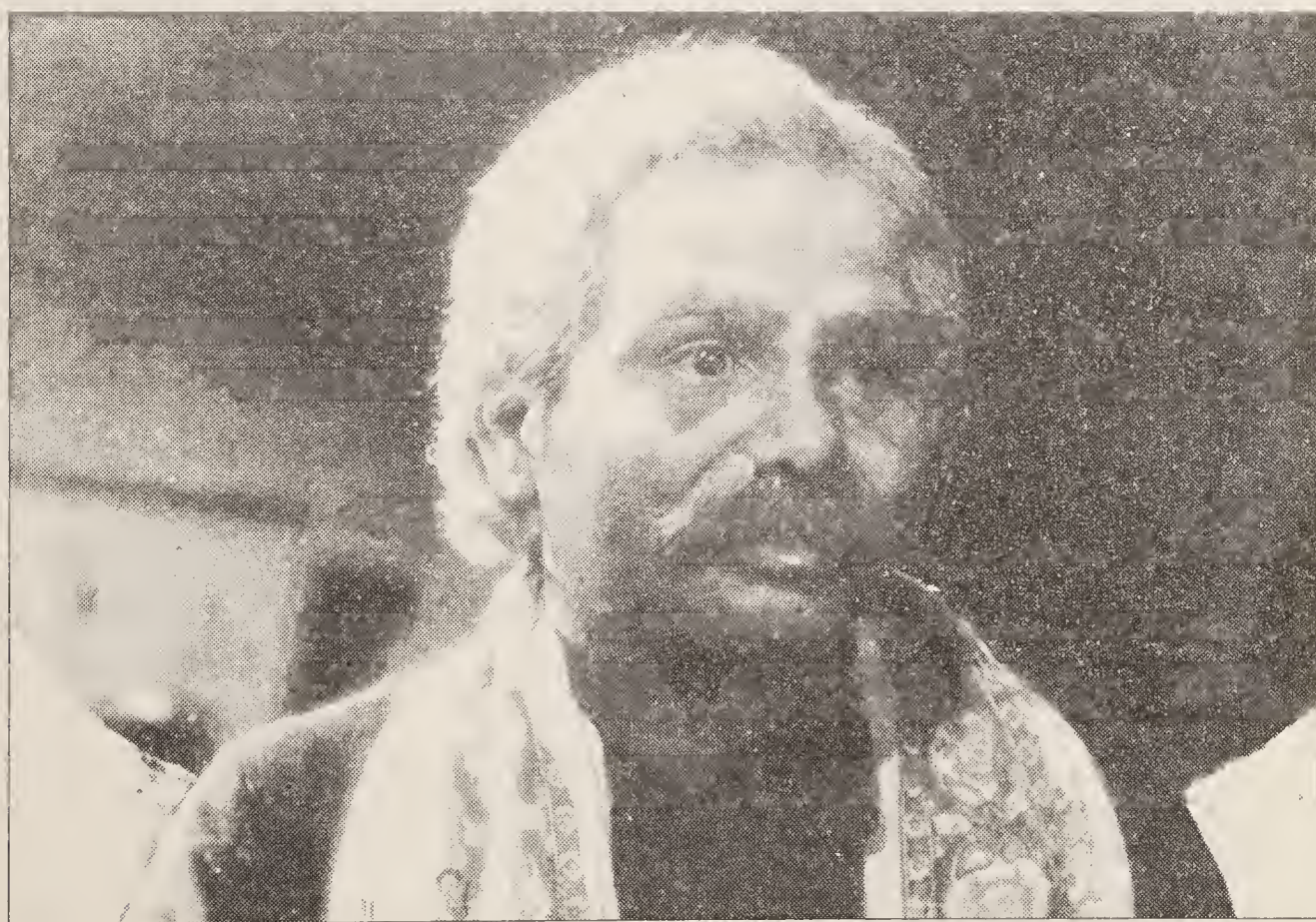
B. N. Reddi sometime around 1935. H. M. Reddy was impressed by the tall figure and particularly the mellifluous voice of Nagaiah, when he was introduced by B. N. Reddi. The role of a social worker that Nagaiah was assigned with, was eminently suitable to him. His songs, particularly *Kallu Manandoyi* appealed to common people — and there he was being identified with the commoners — the song which brought him nearer to people was itself based on K. C. De's *Ankhiyon Khol Babu*. No wonder, Nagaiah, in his very first film came to be known as *Andhra K. C. De* " 2.

1939. The birth of Vauhini saw H. M. Reddy part from B. N. Reddi's team. B. N. Reddi directed Vauhini's maiden film *Vande mataram* , in which Nagaiah was cast in the hero's role. Kanchanamala was the leading lady. Nagaiah once again nailed the criticism that 30-year old actor cannot do justice to romantic roles, by sheer talent. B. N. Reddi took a leaf from Nagaiah's life to include it in the film — the episode in which Nagaiah was cheated by that Ceylonese pseudo business man. A financial tragedy, with passage of time, was being viewed with an amount of amusement. *Vandemataram* also launched Nagaiah , the music composer.

A conservative paper like *The Hindu* opened up its pages to point out " the canard that south Indian films are no match to north is nailed by this masterpiece " — and that masterpiece was *Sumangali* , again a Vauhini presentation. With merely two films to his acting career credit, Nagaiah was in for a rude shock — at least , what he considered as a shock. Modelling the character of



A still from 'Vandemataram' showing Nagaiah, Kanchanamala and Kalyani



Nagaiah as Panthulu in 'Sumangali' (1940)

Panthulu in the film, on Kandukuri Veereshalingam Panthulu, Nagaiah was dressed up with a white silk wig ("*especially imported from Paris* " : B. N. Reddi). This was unexpected for he was aiming to be hero. Apparently irked by the proposition, which required mouthing not romantic lyrics but social reformatory preachings, donning the silvery wig and walk now turned into a shaky one — Nagaiah complained about his apprehensions to B. N. Reddi. B. N. Reddi however asked him to accept the role as a challenge. Regardless of his own apprehensions, instead of losing popularity, Nagaiah's histrionic talents brought accolades. But this film served as a background which made Nagaiah to give a serious thought towards launching his own film *Bhagyalakshmi*.

At about the same time, with permission from B. N. Reddi, he accepted an assignment for acting in *Viswa Mohini* for Y. V. Rao. Nagaiah's role of a film director in his first outside - Vauhini film, offered him a lighter role. The film itself concentrated more on the enchantress of a star. To an extent the film was both futuristic and prophetic in its dealing with the celluloid world. It anticipated the star system at a time when there was no such system anywhere in south India, where the word of the film-maker ruled ; it was prophetic for in a few years Nagaiah himself was to become a star who commanded high remuneration, and an amount of enviable stylistic living.

The year 1941 became a significant one in Nagaiah's career. He entered the Tamil filmdom through Murugan Talkies' *Ashok Kumar* in that year — with the titular role of a doting father of a wayward prince (M. K. Thiagaraja

Bhagavathar) bringing majesty that was unseen in the films of the day. The same year also saw him acting in Vauhini's *Devata*. Apparently, Vauhini had chiseled out alternate years as hero - roles marked for Nagaiah, while the intervening years saw him acting in serious biographical roles. In that pattern, *Devata* offered him the role of a London - returned Barrister who was to seduce the housemaid. Nagaiah reminisces : " I am by nature a shy type. Naturally my friends were apprehensive of my ability to act in this seduction scene. In fact, to an extent I was also disturbed by the scene. The film also became a turning point in my personal life " ³. The turning point was, the way he landed in wedlock, once again, when he carried the reduction scene of *Devata* into his house. Jayalakshmi, who was a student from Chittor, staying in Nagaiah's house became a temptress, later his life-partner.

Commenting on Nagaiah's acting calibre in *Devata*, *Ananda Vikatan*, a popular Tamil periodical in its July 20, 1941 issue mentions : " Nagaiah is a first class actor. When he is mentally suffering, he did not sing, those formula songs. No not a word. He conveyed everything through facial expressions ". May be this is what admirers of Nagaiah meant when they vouched, ' Nagaiah used to live in the roles '. Curiously enough, Vauhini's *Vandemataram*, *Sumangali* and *Devata*, though Telugu films, received unique reception in Tamil speaking areas as to warrant printing of synopsis and songs book in Tamil!

Even as Tamil Press was taking notice of Nagaiah, *Ashok Kumar* was running to crowded houses and set a record of continuous screening for 40 weeks in many places of south India.



Nagaiah as Ashok Kumar (Tamil-1941)

The music of film became a rage in the hearts of Tamil film goers. As noted earlier, *Sumangali* had stirred Nagaiah's ambition to launch his own production unit. Maybe one would not call it even ambition — for afraid of becoming a stereotyped actor Nagaiah wanted to ensure a place as a protagonist of many a film. Naming his production unit as Renuka Films — as if paying a tribute to H. M. Reddy's association in his very first film — Nagaiah launched *Bhagyalakshmi*. Assigning music to Bhimvarapu Narasimha Rao, the actor took up the lead role — here again, as an idealist teacher. Nurturing one-sided love in his heart, the protagonist is in for a shock, even as *Bhagya* does not respond to him. She impassionately marries away a young person arranged by her parents. Sacrifice was the next step. Nagaiah disappointed leaves the house, becomes a vagabond, has a brief encounter with a lambada girl, and when he returns, rumours take the toll of the youngster. P. Pulliah recalls, "the amount of effort that Nagaiah put into ensure that sacrifice and idealism are brought forward in the movie is indeed laudable" ⁴. Acknowledging his association with N. S. Krishnan and T. A. Mathuram — a popular comedian couple of Tamil Screen — Nagaiah carved out a role for them in the film. Thus what began as a protest to Vauhini's roles, heralded a producer in Nagaiah. But his memorable performances were yet to come.

After taking up a role in *Chenchulakshmi*, Nagaiah was signed by Vauhini's for their biographical *Bhakta Potana*. That Nagaiah was being swayed by a variety of self-made apprehensions during this period cannot be disputed. While on



Nagaiah and Giri in 'Bhagyalakshmi' (1943)



Nagaiah and Kumari in 'Devatha' (1941)

the one hand he was keen that the role of *Potana* should come to him to counter the criticism that Nagaiah would only suit romantic roles — the circle seems complete even as it is the same rumour mongers who had apprehended that Nagaiah would not fit hero's shoes — he wanted to accept the role as a challenge. But then, he was also afraid that the stereotype is at last being confirmed — he was Pathulu in *Sumangali* and now a saint - poet ! K. V. Reddy came out with the news that he had pleaded with Vauhini team that ' only Nagaiah could do the role ' — these words of K. V. Reddy became prophetic, even as much as no one has succeeded in bettering the biographical roles of saints in this part of the country which Nagaiah had donned. Be that as it may, Nagaiah was taken aback when the production unit suggested that he should shave off his hair for the role. This was something he was unprepared for. Mudigonda Lingamurthy, a long time colleague of Nagaiah recalls, " I was with Nagaiah when his hair was ' sacrificed ' to the razor's edge. After having our bath, I took him to the studio, now clean - shaven, was not very happy, on the make up chair, he appeared very serious. In fact he looked as if he was overwhelmed by anger. The make up was done with great care. Once this was complete . . . there he was, Presto, instead of Nagaiah, we saw, divinity personified, Potana . I ran to fetch K. V. Reddy to see the new *Avatar*. Believe me, we even broke coconuts in front of his feet. From that moment, till the last reel was shot, during shooting, Nagaiah observed a kind of discipline which was unmatched by the artistes of his time. He repeated this devotional discipline when he acted in *Vemana* and his own *Thyagayya* " ⁵.

Bhakta Potana was modelled on Prabhat theatres ' crop of films on saint-poets. At a time when the country was witnessing an upsurge in patriotic fervour, revival of Bhakti, spiritual regeneration, was catching up with the idealism of the times. Vauhini had chosen a theme which was very dear to the hearts of Telugu speaking people. Bammara Potanamatyā was a Bhakti poet. Besides being translator of Vālmiki *Ramayana* into Telugu his contribution to the Telugu literature was monumental. Nagaiah who was also looking after the music composition for the film used all his capabilities to portray this saint-poet in an appealing manner, even as his physical stature eminently suited the character of a poet. In spite of the tremendous advantages that the film brought out for Nagaiah, he nursed a grievance of having accepted roles which were ' not made for him '. Such feelings were , however, short-lived!

. *Bhakta Potana* proved a milestone in Nagaiah's acting career, while its popularity even in languages other than Telugu, ensured a place for him in the cine world as an actor eminently suitable for portraying the ascetics. P. Pulliah commented immediately after screening the film in Sun Theatre in Madras, " your portrayal in the film will ensure a place in cinema history for you ". Pulliah's prophecy has come true. But then , that prophetic declaration was made on seeing the acting calibre, of Nagaiah whether as a rustic devotee looking after his farm lands or when he is blessed by Lord Rama and directed to translate *Ramayana* into Telugu. Once again, we have to quote his admirers ' he used to live in the role ' — his was evident when one saw him expressing his joy after having completed a poem which was

giving him trouble; or when forced to dedicate the work to local king, he kneels before the idol of Saraswati and vouches that 'I would not sell you for material wealth'!

If these scenes from the film are remembered with a tinge of nostalgia in elderly circles — it speaks about the influence of Nagaiah's acting prowess on the spectators. The popularity of *Bhakta Potana* during those yesteryears can be gauged by a cartoon strip which appeared in *Ananda Vikatan*, Tamil periodical, in which a judge adjourns the hearing saying, "It is time to see *Potana*, case adjourned".

Above all, *Potana* heralded a cultural revival in Telugu and Tamil cinema. Nagaiah himself now ventured to picturise the life of Saint Composer, *Thyagaya Bhakta Jana* and *Chakradhari* in Tamil, went on to sets, even as Vauhini themselves were now busy scripting the life of *Yogi Vemana*. In all these films, Nagaiah was the saint! M. S. Subbulakshmi and Nagaiah paired in *Meera* (Tamil), even as he did his last film under B. N. Reddi's Direction, *Swargaseema*.

Bhakta Potana had established beyond doubt the suitability of Nagaiah for portrayal of *udatta* personalities. A review of the background which moulded Nagaiah into this pattern would reveal the way he had imbibed the orthodox life in his earlier days. In a way his puritanical background made it easy for Nagaiah to portray the lives of these saints on the screen. Inevitably, these films provided greater opportunities for the musician in Nagaiah to excel. Above all, the seriousness with which he approached the biographies is akin to the seriousness that he himself had espoused in real life. Though there was an amount of

naivety in his personality, he was never found to be wanting in philanthropy and human values. Even as he was being confirmed as a popular *star*, with successes like *Ashok Kumar*, Nagaiah was seen distributing money and material to the Congress Party, which was spearheading the freedom movement. In fact as some of his relatives recollect, his demeanour of being sacrificial in nature to a fault did bring financial downfall of Nagaiah. In a way, Nagaiah was moulding himself into an ascetic of sorts in real life. There was an yearning in him to lead the life of a responsible, Gandhian and idealistic citizen — this approach called for sacrifices. And the man was never found wanting when it came to sacrifice. With this background, it was easy for Nagaiah to live in the roles of Saint poets like *Potana*, *Thyagayya* and *Vemana*. Even his bitter critics had to change their opinion about Nagaiah, when they saw him in *Thyagayya*.

A. V. L. Prabhakar, editor, *Anasuya* (Telugu periodical), writing in its August 1947 issue, pays a tribute to his acting in these words : " Eyes play an important role in expressing emotions. It is not enough if one has big eyes without expression. An actor should be able to use those eyes. Sthanam's eyes were of that genre. Nagaiah's too . . . his eyes are very small. But then, they can speak in a variety of languages. When Bobbili Keshavaiah renders his song (in *Thyagayya*), Nagaiah's eyes mirror his concern; when Tanjore Maharaja sends the gifts, Thyagayya is in a dilemma whether to accept the presents and bursts into a song *Nidhi chala sukhama* ; or when Narada blesses him with the *nada* or when he comes to know that in ten days time he would reach Lord Rama's lotus feet — or even in the



Nagaiah as Bhakta Potana (1944)

scene when his wife passes away, . . . it was those eyes that were portraying the emotions experienced by the Saint in the actor. Not only the eyes, Nagaiah's face itself is a peculiar one. His is a mobile face. It is because of this mobility, he has become a top ranking actor "6.

Vauhini's next film *Yogi Vemana*, once again confirmed the saint in Nagaiah. While *Potana* pampered Bhakti, *Thyagayya* gave us the real elevation of this devotion (*Bhakti*) through music (*Sangeetham*), *Vemana* propounded reason (*Gnanam*). The film was aimed to strengthen the ascetic in Nagaiah, and it became yet another landmark in Nagaiah's career. The film might be naive, even gauche, in its presentation, for it unabashedly attributed miracles to a saint who preached reason. The conviction with which Nagaiah enlivened the character, made it scale a height which today's commercial world cannot even dream of attaining. A viewing of *Vemana* us takes back us to Prabhat Studio's *Ekanath*. On the content of *Ekanath*, says Kumar Shahani, "He who thinks of the other as low has lowliness in himself. Yet, this form of idealism does not reflect in the style of the film "7. Willy - nilly, we have to agree with this criticism when we see *Yogi Vemana*. There is an over inclination towards expressionism, which is opposite to idealism. Nagaiah is most likeable as a happy-go-lucky pleasure seeker and a rationalist in the first half of the film, creating an aura which is instantly appealing. In the latter half as *Yogi* he brings a memorable performance, which is fully in the mould of *Potana* and *Thyagayya*. These three films *Potana*, *Thyagayya* and *Vemana* are remembered by cine goers for Nagaiah recaptured their lives



Nagaiah playing musical instruments in 'Chakradhari' (1947)

on the screen. He became an incarnation of sorts.

But these were all Telugu films. What was his contribution to Tamil screen?

In answer, we can cite the opening sentence of a profile which was published in *Kinema* (Tamil periodical) which reads: "The very mention of *Ezhai Padum Paadu* reminds one of Nagaiah's portrayal as Karunakaran. Indeed as a suffering Karunakaran, in *Ezhai Padum Paadu*, Nagaiah has given a memorable performance"⁸. Pakshirajas entrusted both the lead role and music composition to Nagaiah for their *Ezhai Padum Paadu*. K. Ramnoth wielded the megaphone to bring one of the most memorable films Tamil screen has ever seen. Emotional acting, by now, an old hat for Nagaiah, was at its zenith, only to be bettered by Nagaiah himself in his own production *En Veedu*. For Telugu audience, Nagaiah was synonymous with an ascetic on the screen. For Tamilians, in spite of the fact that his films *Chakradhari* and *Bhakta Jana* were screened prior to the release of *Ezhai Padum Paadu*, his portrayal as the lowest,—together with that monumental role by Seetharaman as Javar, was so popular as evident from the fact, he came to be known as Javar Seetharaman — left an indelible mark. The Telugu version also became a classic. A later version *Nirupedalu*, done by A. Nageswara Rao, just did not possess the impact of Nagaiah's acting. With *Ezhai Padum Paadu*, Nagaiah's image was bigger than life, even as laurels poured on him. This film was the best example of Nagaiah's acting calibre.

Around this time, 1950, Nagaiah was toying with the idea of producing once again a film. *En Veedu* was preceded by a



A scene from 'Swarga Seema' (1945)

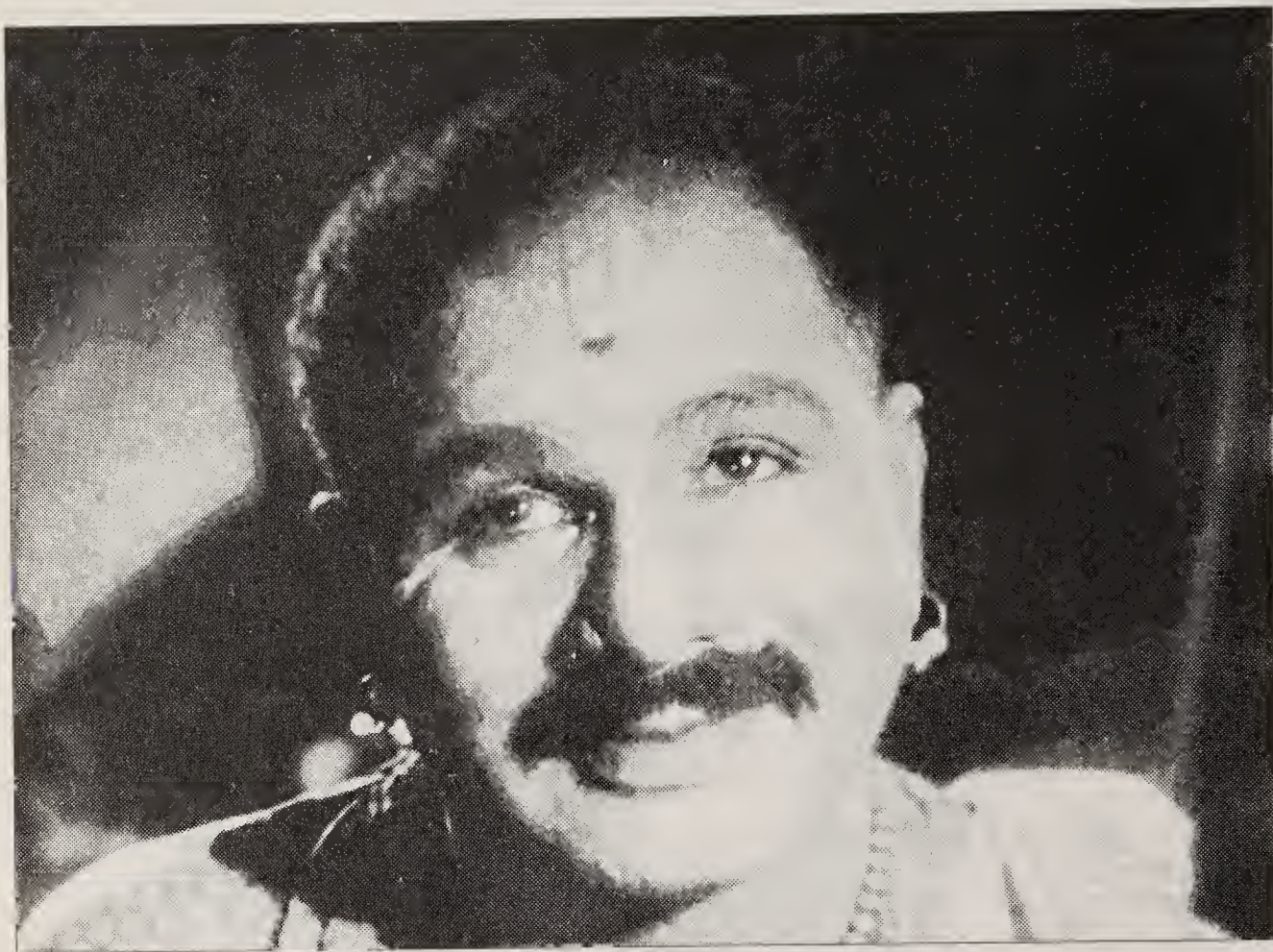
Gandhian film, *Navajeevanam* (Tamil), the success of which was a morale booster for Nagaiah. He turned out to be a busiest actor when he brought out *En Veedu*. The year 1953 saw at least ten of his films released, while the following year also saw a similar number of films — each one of them a money spinner and a pathsetter. *Gumasta*, for instance, in Telugu and Tamil, confirmed Nagaiah's penchant in acting with an amount of ease and aplomb in the roles of poverty stricken middle class commoner. *Ulagam*, *Thuli Visham*, *Maa Gopi* (*Vazhartha Paasam*), each a memorable film in its own right. Then came at the fag end of 1954, a memorable film that Nagaiah ever acted in. *Vidudalai* of K. Ramnoth, saw Nagaiah not as a saint poet, not even as the travail ridden middle class householder, as he was identified by Tamilians, but as a scheming advocate whose business was to colour the truth into lie and vice - versa ! *Vidudalai* was the touchstone of Nagaiah's acting calibre. Whether trying to shield his brother Chellaiah, from the clutches of law — which he can turn and twist, or rubbing off the crime on to a timid *jutka* driver, Nagaiah simply excelled. As the jargon goes, he lived in the role.

As far as Nagaiah is concerned, living in a role is neither a jargon, nor an exaggeration. A simple fact which would point out to the acting propensities he exhibited in *Potana*, *Thyagayya*, *Vemana* or *Vidudalai*.

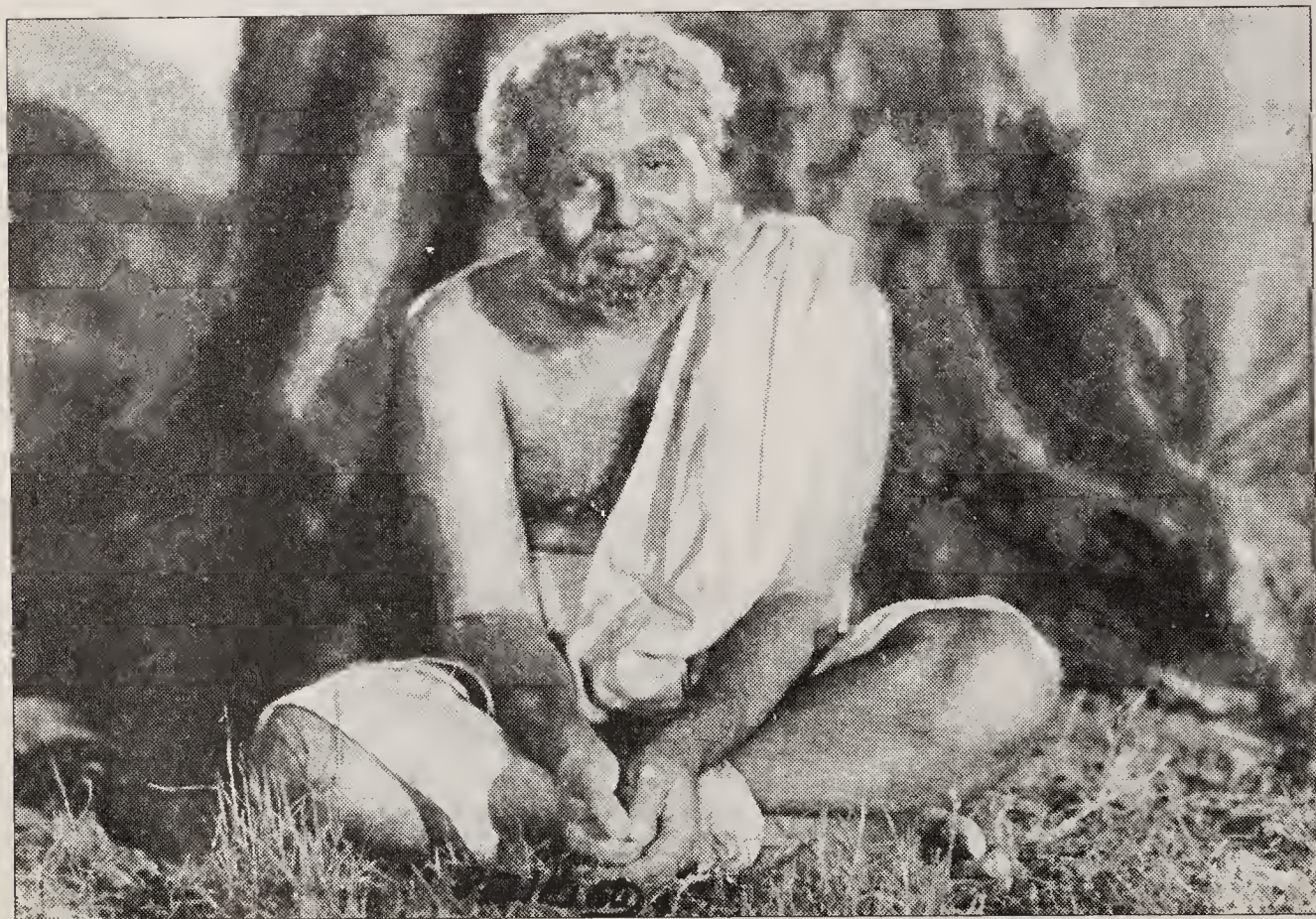
As critics confirmed, it was not Nagaiah on the screen, but it was a *Thaygayya* singing his compositions or a Periaswamy up to mischief without an iota of mercy for truth ! Nagaiah has come a long way from the unsure steps that he was feeling the ground with, in his earlier film days. He was at

the zenith. Telugu and Tamil cinema industry were at their aesthetic best. The shadow of star-system was still to creep into the industry. Unmindful of the inevitable changes, the time would usher in, Nagaiah launched his own production *Ramadasu* — again, a saint poet ! It was a step taken with an amount of risk — a risk which he was not aware of. He was already 48 years. To cinema standards, he was becoming old. Younger *stars* had invaded the screen. He had financially lost in his earlier venture *En Veedu* . He was a witness to the changes that were taking place. N. T. Rama Rao, A. Nageswara Rao on the Telugu Screen, M. G. Ramachandran, Shivaji Ganesan and Gemini Ganesan on the Tamil screen had nudged many an old artiste. But then the committed actor in Nagaiah proceeded. When things became difficult — which meant money was not forthcoming to complete his film — he condescended to accept minor roles.

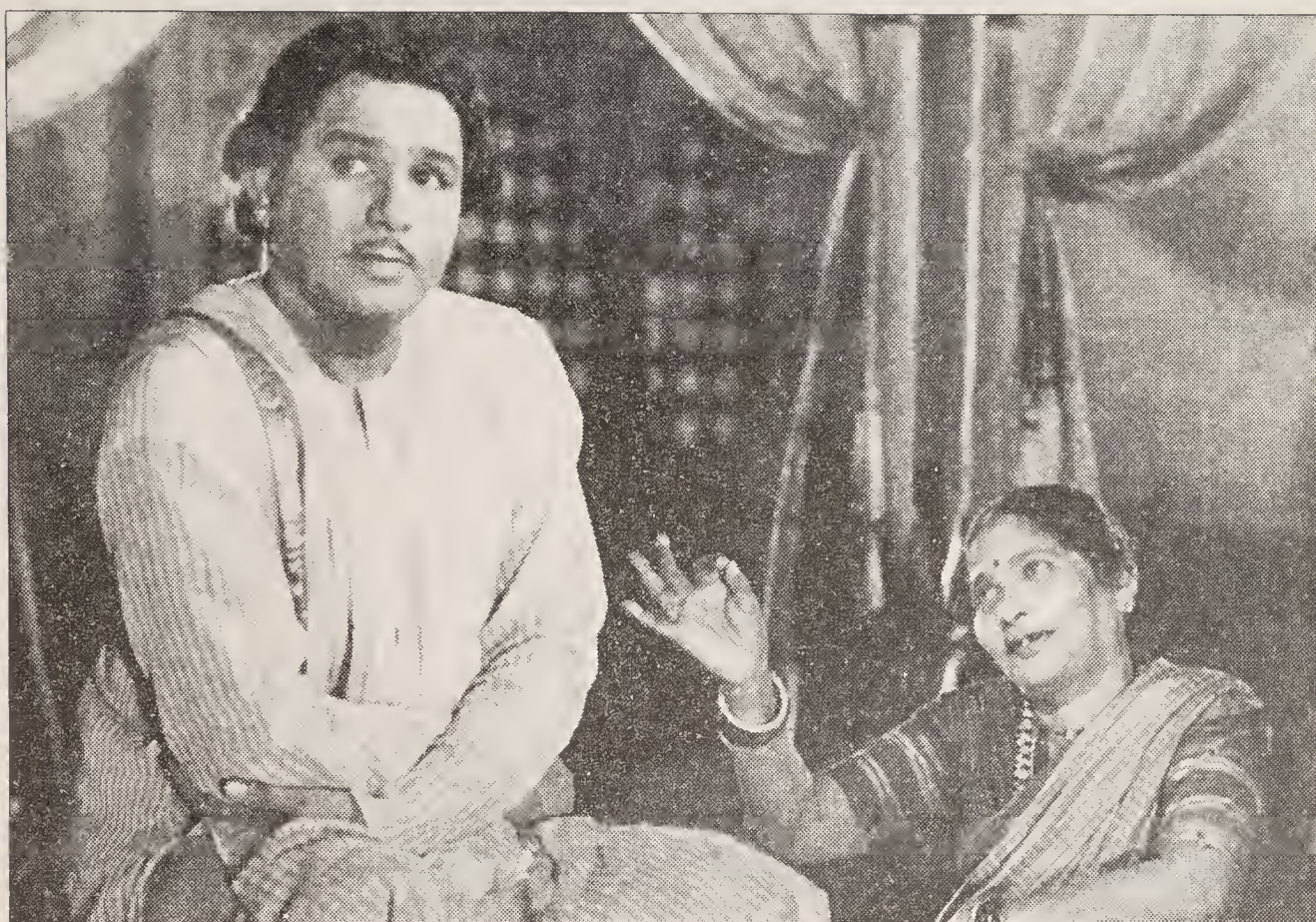
" Why not accept smaller roles ? What harm is there ?" questioned Kamalakara Kameswara Rao, "this is not a matter to be debated at all. For Nagaiah art was supreme than what it fetched the artiste. I had worked with him as an assistant Director and I had the opportunity to request him for small roles like that of Vidura in *Pandava Vanavasam*. When approached, he would not say 'no'. He would rather say, "as long as I can act, I will ". And act, he did. He brought a rare type of dignity even to these roles. In *Anarkali*, for instance as Ugrasen, he gave a memorable performance. In *Kanavane Kankanda Deivam* as a father figure, an archetype which stuck to him till last; and then in a spate of films like *Bhakta*



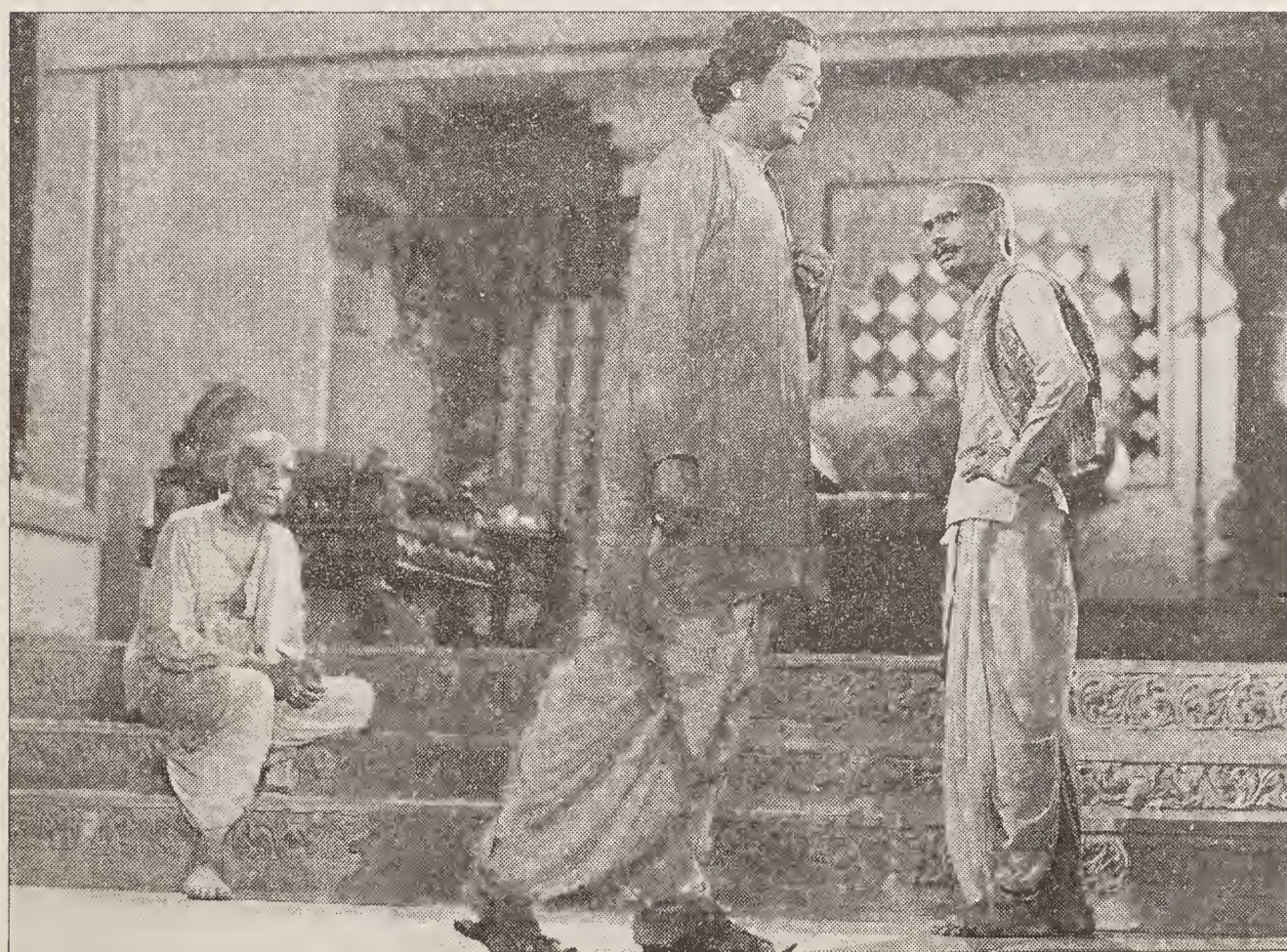
Nagaiah in 'Chakradhari'



Nagaiah as Yogi Vemana



A scene from 'Yogi Vemana' (1947)

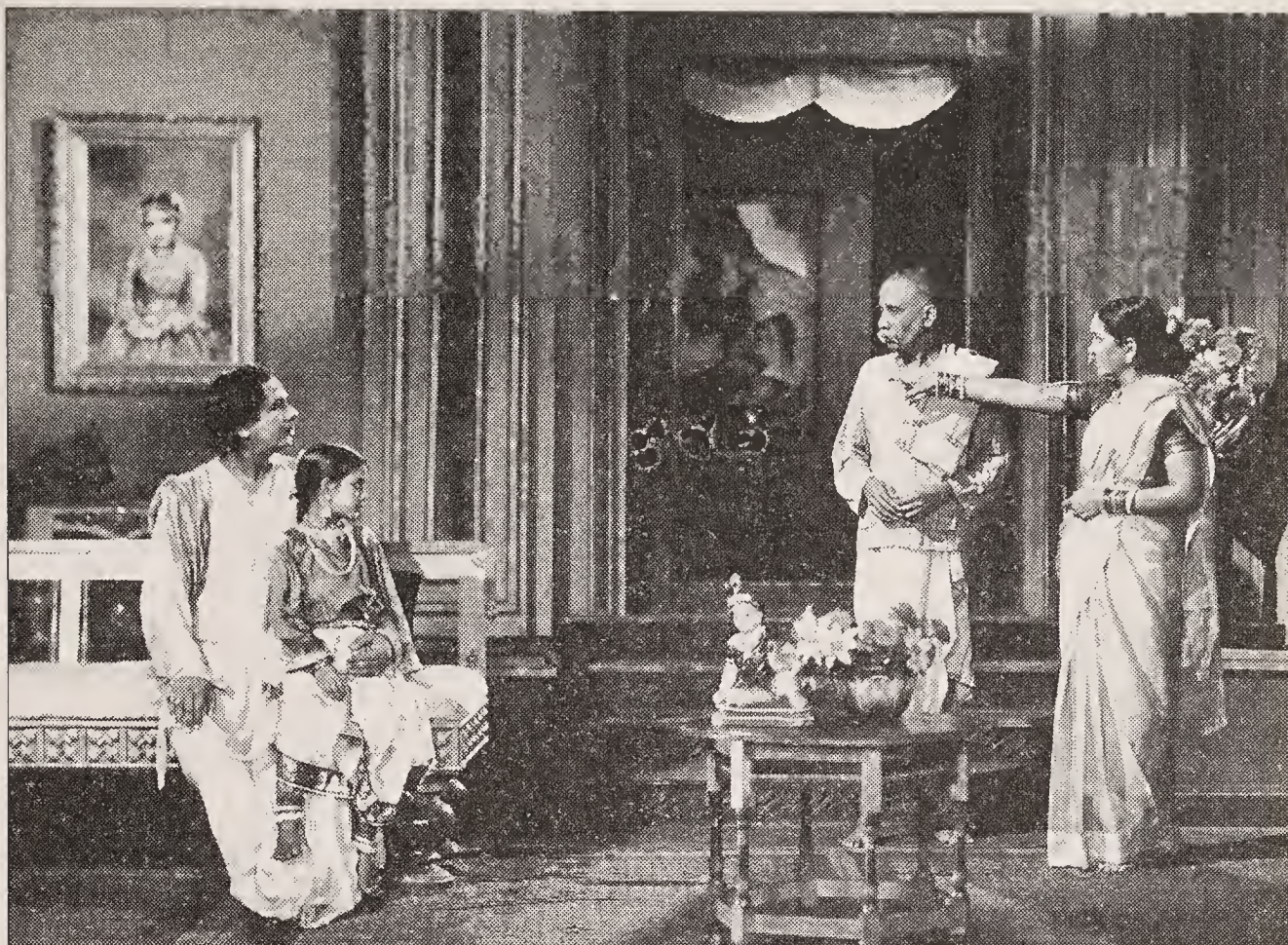


A dramatic moment in 'Yogi Vemana'

Markandeya , *Bhakta Sabari* , *Krishna Satya*, etc., he was Rajarshi. In *Tenali Ramakrishna* we encounter him as Thimmarasu. Nagaiah is remembered for the wit and wisdom that he brought to this film — all these film acting stints were to complete his dream project *Ramadasu* . He had to raise finance. He had to complete the film. It was veritably a vicious circle.

The travails of *Ramadasu* were now his own. *Ramadasu*, saw the last flicker of the brilliant acting typical of Nagaiah. The biography was well scripted after a reasearch, and gave importance to the music that Ramadasu left as a legacy to Telugu culture, and stood as the fulfilment of a dream after a long struggle. But the scars of the battle remained for ever. The success of the film did not mean monetary benefit to the producer, Nagaiah, who had written off the rights of the film in favour of the financiers. Having spent a decade in the production line, the film was outdated — when weighed by the standards of mid-sixties. The financial blow that this effort wrought could not be withstood by the artiste, for there was no buffer (as was in the case of *En Veedu*) of income from other films. He was acting in many a film — no doubt, but that was only to settle the debts he had incurred. Meanwhile, health was playing truant with him.

In early 1973, bogged down by continuing financial troubles, he had to get himself admitted for a prostate gland operation in Madras. Immediately after the operation, a film producer took him to Kodaikanal — no, not for giving a rest to



Nagaiah, Baby Krishnaveni, Parvati Bai and Dura Swamy in 'Yogi Vemana'



Nagaiah and Kanamba in 'Nava Jivanam' (1949)

the tired soul, but to make him fulfil an assignment. In Kodaikanal while shooting, he took bad and was brought back to Madras. He lived only a couple of months thereafter.

While his earlier portrayals of Potana , Thaygayya and Vemana made the admirer think of Nagaiah's versatility, *Ramadasu* willy-nilly conjures the image of a dogged old man who is being eaten away from all sides, and yet proceeding ahead with his aim. *Ramadasu* was financed by raising money from a variety of sources. He completed the film. He saw no returns. A saga unmatchable in its pathos, even as the last days approached, Nagaiah was virtually penniless. A person who gave before asking was now bedridden with nobody to offer help, save for Jayalakshmi and a few friends like Mudigonda Lingamurthy at his side, who however were in no position to alleviate his sufferings. The amount of pain that his heart would have suffered at this state of affairs can only be imagined. But then, never complaining, as Kamala Chandrababu recalls, Nagaiah was optimistic. " He was sure that he would live for some more time and would complete another film. He was considering this facet as a brief period of bad luck " . That was his optimistic outlook — but then a star had fallen — and the brilliance when it was shining up in the skies became a legendary memory.

Chapter 4

His Music

"... and then there was the song ..."

RIGHT from the first talkie, music with a variety of influences — from classical, folk and devotional stratum — has been an experimenting ground for many a film music composer. When Nagaiah entered filmdom, cinema music had not evolved for itself a systematised stylistic embellishment, as it largely continued to mimic stage music. Nagaiah's entry, in a way, marked a departure for the simple reason that for the first time in Telugu cinema history, H. M. Reddy's team was conducting an experiment in taking the cinematic themes towards socially relevant subjects. The political situation in the country was at the background to provide patriotic fervour to the songs. Thus, though Nagaiah himself was a product of the stage and had imbibed long years of its influence, he had perforce to bring an amount of experiment into the renderings. But, this was not difficult for him.

Stage music had its own influences and Nagaiah had to interleave these influences with the regional notes to evolve a distinct style. The songs with which he entered the filmdom testified that the artiste was capable of blending poetry and sounds of musical notes into such a harmony that they turned emotional in their appeal. Later branching off into composition of music for films, Nagaiah has amply demonstrated his skill in developing a homogenous style for the cinema, without compromising on the classic base. Verily, on this platter Nagaiah took music to the threshold of common man through the medium of cinema. With the emergence of cinema singer, music did not restrict itself to be the hobby of a lucky few. Cinema music had received recognition of the common man.

Historical Perspective :

" Indian film was exploiting (in its early stages) the readymade receptivity of the audience created and conditioned by the regional theatre which had newly emerged in the 19th century. The presentations of the Theatre were usually replete with songs, thus films followed the imitating strategy (Barnow & Krishnaswamy) "¹

Theatre music in Andhra, however, came under a very strong influence when Bal Gandharva, a noted Maharastrian singer, extensively toured this part of the country. His mode of rendering songs attracted many a composer and imitations were immediately on the fringe.

For south Indian singers adoption of Hindustani music was easy. The difference was after all in the style of rendering. Whereas classical Carnatic music has a systematised pattern, thanks to Purandara Dasa, who brought a unique marriage of lyrics with musical notes ; such musical extravaganza and marriage of lyrics with music was absent in the Hindustani stream. North India, has successively come under the impact of a variety of invading rulers developed *gharanas* (schools), stylising musical strands. The south Indian music had the unique opportunity of developing a set of 72 possibilities of permutations and combinations of *Ragas* (Melakartas) thanks to Venkatamukhi's efforts. The Hindustani stream did not pay such an attention for systematic flourishes in its style. Consequently, it had a limited number of Ragas [the very word *Raga* is derived from a Sanskrit adage, *Ranjayinte Ragah*— (that which pleases) — defies any specific definition] which were developed by each Gharana into its own stylistic embellishment.

Indian film, being a continuation of the musical folk drama (like Tamasha, Jatra, Keertan), carried the heritage thoroughly systematised in ancient Sanskrit dramaturgy. The first Telugu Talkie, *Bhakta Prahalada* (1931) had its music which was not very different from the theatre music. With the influence of Hindustani exponents, and the easy adaptability of Carnatic form to the musical concepts of Hindustani, an amount of inter-leaving of these forms went into rendering the non-classical film music. Before the evolution of film music as a strand-independent, Gramophone Companies throughout the country were bringing out records of a variety of artistes like Bal Gandharava, Narayana Rao Vyas, who

had brought in the embellishments the "exotica picked up from the Parsi dramatic companies"². And what were the Parsi Companies? the Parsi theatre had strong base in British theatre of the 19th century, even as it adopted proscenium stage to the complicate backstage machinery from the English. Once having imported this base to Indian conditions, they adopted elements of folk theatre. Mythologicals with their inbuilt songs were superbly adoptable and songs became part of the theatre . . . and then part of the films.

Nagaiah's early career had imposed a condition that every artiste, like the stage singer, aiming to make it good on the screen, should invariably be a singer. There were no voice synchronisation facilities in the early days, and visuals were shot simultaneously with the sound recording. The entire group of musicians followed the artistes in a trolley with instruments like harmonium, tabla etc. No wonder Nagaiah paid much attention to the way he rendered a song. . . for he wanted to prove a success on the screen.

Nagaiah's background in music:

Nagaiah was a regular stage artiste and a Gramophone disc recordist before he entered the films. Right from the early age, he was exposed to the notes of music, for having born into an orthodox family where recitation of *Vedas* was considered a ritual of importance; he was exposed to the music of *Vedas*. It is pertinent to note that *Vedic* intonations occur in three syllable patterns : the central syllable, *Udatta* , receiving the main accent;



A tense scene from 'Ezhai Padum Paadu' (1950)



Kanamba and Nagaiah in 'Rama Dasu'

the preceding syllable, *Anudatta* is a kind of preparation for the accent and the following syllable *Svarita* is return from accentuation to accentlessness. (Some attribute these intonations to pitch, while others to stress). The point to note is that with an orthodoxy emphasising *Vedic* recitations, music was in his blood, which was directed to a course through his father who himself was a singer — being a *Harikatha Vidwan* . If one stresses ones knowledge of *Vedic* intonations to music, it is easily discernible that while Vedic intonations are based on sets of three notes (Sa, Ri, Ga and Pa, Da, Ni), Carnatic and to an extent Hindustani music brought a *Madhyama Sruti* (Ma) making into a systematised composition of notes. Thus it is easy for a chanter of *Vedic* hymns to evolve himself into a singer. No wonder, Nagaiah evolved himself in to a singer.

But then, Nagaiah was no ordinary imitating singer. Having proved that he could sing, he took lessons from Chittoor Peraiah Pillai and Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, not to talk about his father, who was an avowed music lover. (The love of music was so strong that when the father of Nagaiah, having accustomed to the recitation of slokas by his daughter-in-law, was deprived of it by the untimely death of the young lady, became demented). This interest in music led Nagaiah to the stage, the only outlet for a boy of his contacts and milieu to develop his art. Nagaiah's exposure to the Telugu theatre music of twenties and thirties stood in good stead for his later compositions. Having had his background in Carnatic music, it was easy for Nagaiah to adopt to Hindustani music, which was increasingly becoming popular on the theatre,

thanks to the visiting North Indian exponents. As we have noted elsewhere the difference in between Carnatic and Hindustani music lies primarily in the style of renderings. Carnatic is highly adoptable to other streams. This is evident, if we consider for instance, how Mysore Vasudevachariar, a noted exponent of Carnatic music, composed his *Kadana Kuthuhala* after having witnessed a Western concert brought to India by the East India Company. With this kind of felicity, it was only natural for Nagaiah to imbibe in him the influences that were brought into the Threatre music of yore.

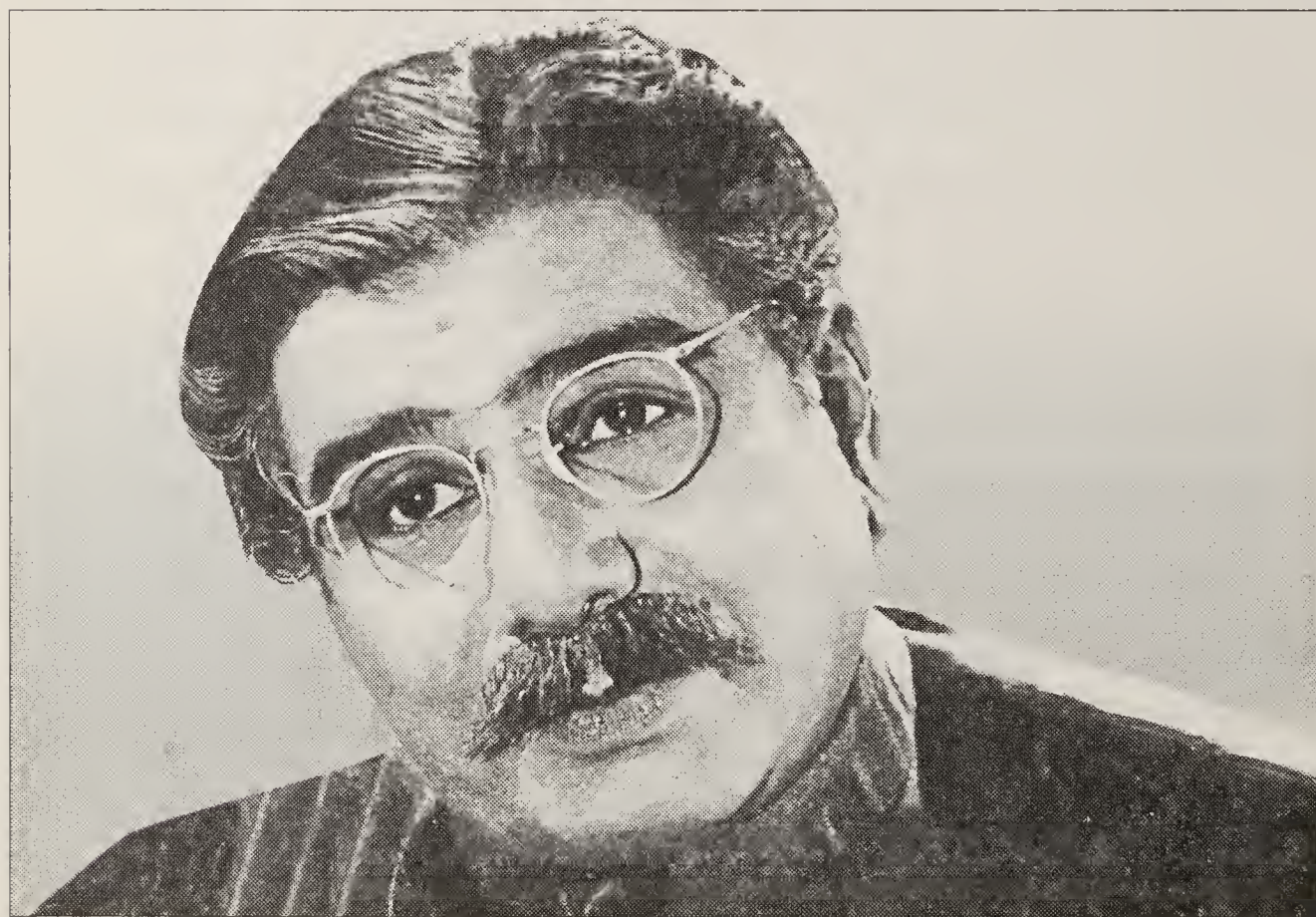
For the Gramophone Company, Nagaiah had recorded some Thygaraya Keertanas, Javalis, Ashtapadis of Jayadeva. One of the earliest record available now, *Mel Mel Owra Balaka* from *Bhakta Prahalada* for Gramphone Company, mirrors the nuances of Nagaiah's career as a stage - musician. It is with this legacy that Nagaiah entered filmdom and rendered songs to the music composed by P. Satyanarayana, in *Gruhalakshmi*. Pure emotion was let loose to play with the musical notes in the songs of the film. That in his very first film Nagaiah's songs deviated from the mumbo-jumbo of pseudo classicism is discernible. This effort heralded a new musical style for the south Indian film song — a style which was also being perfected in the north by Saigal and R. C. Boral.

Nagaiah—Music Composer

Vandemataram launched Nagaiah as a composer of music. As a composer he excelled in the way he delineated



A scene from 'En Vedu' (1953) Tamil



Nagaiah in 'Penn' (AVM-1954) Tamil



Nagaiah as Vidura in 'Pandava Vanavasam'

particular instruments of music. That he was fascinated by clarionet is evident, even as right from *Sumangali* (his second film as a music composer), for all films, through *Na Illu* and *Ramadasu* , we see the composer Nagaiah using the clarionet very imaginatively. Some of the songs received an ephemeral quality when they were composed to the renderings of clarionet like *Vastaade ma Baava* (*Sumangali*, 1940), *Adigadigo gaganaseema* (*Na Illu*, 1953).

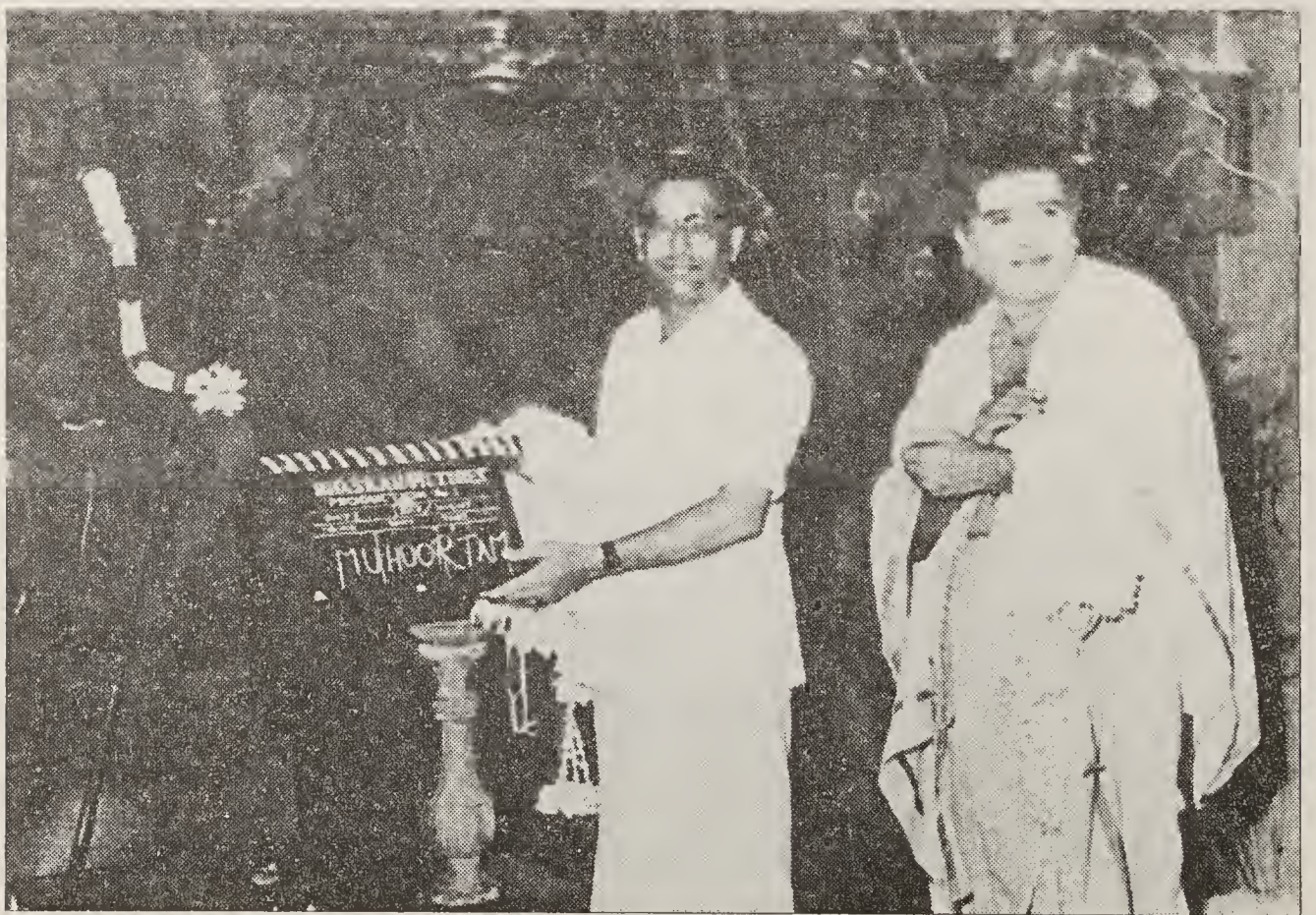
Adigadigo Gaganaseema was moulded in Saranga Raga. Music pundits will agree that this Raga is one of the most amenable ragas, for experimentation. It is a pentatonic raga, with five notes, and has been called as the raga of *Madhynaham* (afternoon). Lesiurely exponation of Raga has allowed many a commercial presentation to exploit it. Yet another feature of Saranga is that it is easy to render and any kind of poetic meter can be adopted to this Raga. One pertinent question which may well arise, what was so great about Nagaiah adopting a Raga which is so very easily adaptable? Unlike the commercial milieu of later cinema, Nagaiah based the classical intonations of this Hindustani Raga for his songs, while flourishing poetry in those musical embellishments, bringing the song an identity of its own. Never was the song yet another adoption of Saranga Raga in his hands. Many critics have vouched that after Nagaiah, film music composers have failed to come anywhere near the profundity and aestheticity that was brought into *Adigadigo*, albeit remaining well within the classical parameters. V. A. K. Ranga Rao says, if anybody came near this presentation it was S.

Viswanathan, who tries a similar experiment in a Tamil film *Siritta Mugham* in his song, *konjum neram ennai maranden*.

Nagaiah was very innovative in those early years of cinema music. He was an adept master in ensuring singers to tow his line or perfection. He never used to derive pleasure in assigning songs to singers who cannot come up to his standards. Instead he made the task of singers easy by assigning only such songs which they can render. He drew the melody and tuned the ordinary songs into classics. Kanchanamala, for instance, is a very limited singer. In *Vandemataram* he gave her a bit. Considering her limitations, he made her sing *Sundara Malati Evarivani Telisi Kulukedevo* , and *O murali, O murali, Murari Nee Dari leda, Murali* . Kanchanamala begins the song, in each of the two songs, and even as she completes the subtler parts of the song, Nagaiah himself catches up and completes the complicated portions, ensuring a continuity, never allowing the limitations of the artiste to mar the beauty of the song. In *Thai Ullam*, Balasaraswati sings to Nagaiah's music, *Maalai Nilavu Varavendum* : Like Kanchanamala she a very limited singer, albeit her melodious voice. It was left to Nagaiah to exploit this beautiful voice. Even classical musicians like M. L. Vasantakumari came under his sway. M. L. Vasantakumari rendered an ephemeral song, based on a Hindi disc *Thandi Hawai* as *Konjum Purave* , which imbibed not only the influences of the earlier mentioned Hindi music, but also the Western music from *Samson and Delilah* which had just then been released in India. A judicious mixture of these two gave birth to *Konjum Purave* .



Nagaiah as a patriarchal head in a later film



A shooting still from his film

When it came to B. N. Reddi's films, Nagaiah exercised considerable care, for Reddi himself was a sensitive lover of music. The accent invariably used to be on aesthetics. Aesthetics apart, his classicism base is to be appreciated. In *Devata*, *Vendi Kanchalalo Vedi Buvvalu* is a clear adaptation of Maund Raga. Though this has no classical base, it has its genesis in Baul music of the Bhakti cult in Bengal. Thus when he brought the rhythms usually addressed to the venerable Lord, to cajole a young boy into eating his dinner — by pleading and placating, he brought a kind of divinity not only to the song, but to the very concept of children.

As a music composer of his own production, his unstinted avocation and assiduous espousing of traditional format is one of the greatest achievements. This is significant, when one considers the fact that cine music is not known for its classicism. *Thaygayya* is a sterling achievement, for the simple fact that Nagaiah brought in sincere efforts to ensure the classic nature of the saint composers composition, which he was using in the biography. For one thing, Nagaiah made an effort to understand music of Thyagaraja. While choosing a subject which was replete with Bhakti and music in such a proportion as found in this saint composer's life, he was testifying his own love for these two genres. In *Thyagayya*, Nagaiah gave prominence to *Bhakti*. Poetry became instrumental in bringing out emotion through sound. This emotion was capitalised by the music composer in such a way that both devotion and emotion were entwined inasmuch as they became one, while the composer himself never compromised on the traditional presentation of the songs.

This was an extraordinary feat. How did he achieve it ?

The answer lies in the fact that Nagaiah never adopted readymade versions of the renderings. Having taken up the role of Thyagaraja, he condescended that rendering of *keertanas* are to be in typical classical form evolved by the composer saint himself. To understand this aspect of the form, as we have noted in the earlier Chapter on *Thyagayya*, the artiste underwent a kind of scholarship before embarking on the picturisation of *Thyagayya*. A sense of responsibility was all the while evident, inasmuch as he felt he had no business to tamper the musical composition already scaled — he only had to ensure that they are rendered properly. This was a difficult proposition; and in later day's cinema world a complete impossibility, as producers are of wrong notion that if classicism is brought out without tinkering, people may not like the renderings. Nagaiah, being himself the producer of the film, falsified such notions, five decades ago!

The music of *Thyagayya* wholly dissolves into the broader pattern of the biography inasmuch as even 28 kirtanas do not give a sense of too-muchness. Perforce, we have to compare a later version of *Thyagayya*, in which the artiste (thanks to technological advantage of play-back singing) was not a singer, who only moved his lips to another's songs. Above all, many pundits expressed that the *Pancharathana* kritis of Thygayya were rendered in this version in such a way that even an ordinary man was able to find fault with the singing. What indeed happened ? The answer lies in the fact that the second and third generation of artistes have neither the inclination nor the calibre to learn the

aesthetics before trying to show them on the screen. For these men *Thyagayya* is yet another film — for Nagaiah, every film was a life-and-death question. His approach towards film making was that which reflected his fear that unless he excelled he will face extinction.

In *Na Illu (En Veedu)* Nagaiah's love for classical music comes to the fore. Having successfully established that it is possible to render Hindustani music interleaved with Carnatic, without compromising on the traditionality, a kind of music for cinema was evolved by him. The difference between this cinema music and classical renderings as one heard in *Thyagayya* is akin to the difference between Hindustani and Carnatic streams. Carnatic stream possesses a serious systematisation, which Hindustani *gharanas* have lacked. The emphasis on *sahitya* is much less in Hindustani compared to Carnatic. Even like this difference between the streams, Nagaiah's lighter songs for cinema, tend to become ephemeral when compared to his serious ones as one heard in *Thyagayya* and to an extent in *Ramadasu*.

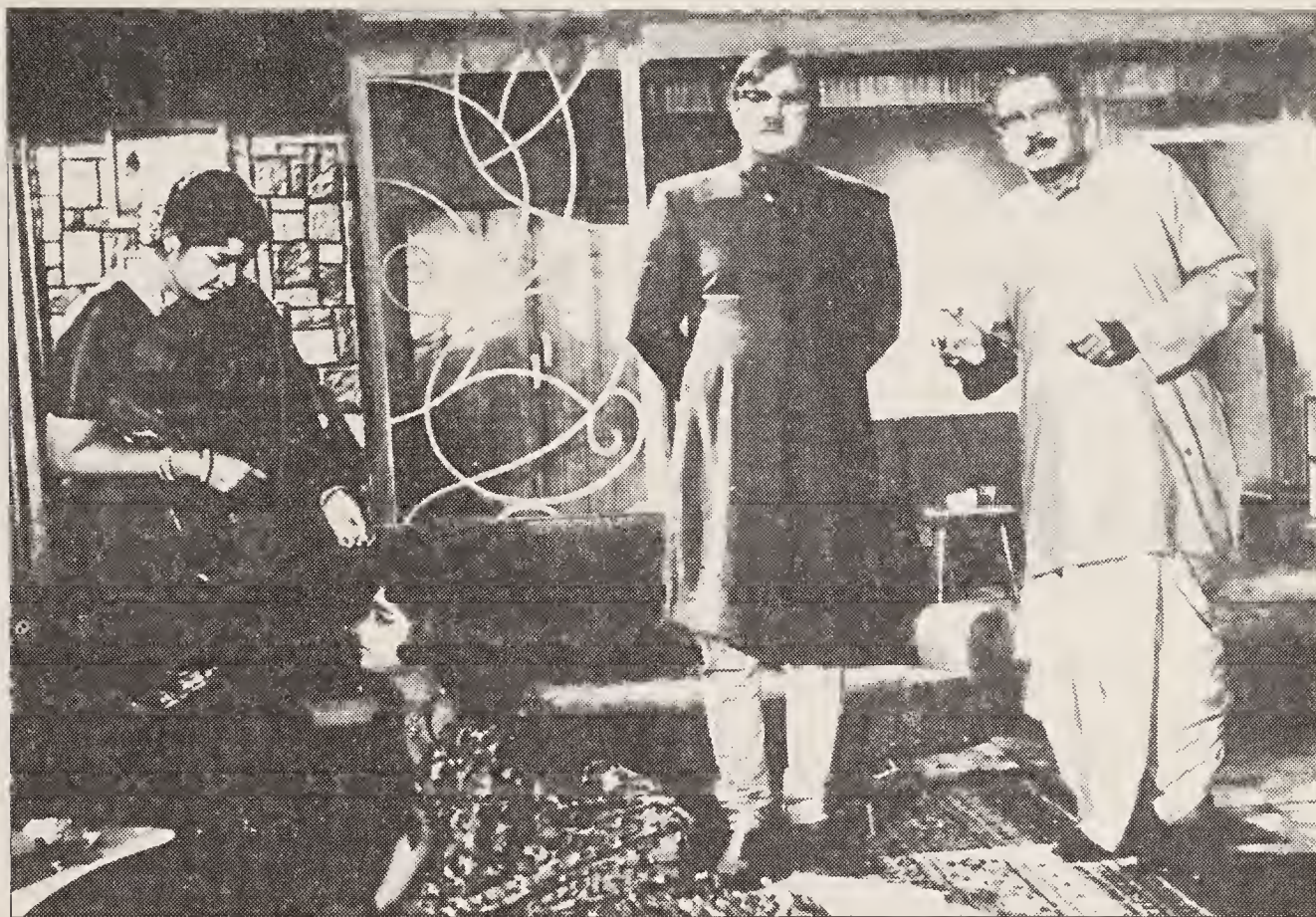
Nagaiah has the distinction of the first music composer who introduced non - regional music into South Indian films. In *Na Illu (En Veedu - Tamil)* he introduced two Hindi songs. Unlike efforts to bring such songs merely for the whim of it, Nagaiah had strong reason for introducing these Hindi songs. The hero (Nagaiah) is on a visit to Bombay. To bring a kind of local flavour, Nagaiah brought in two songs, both sung by Meena Kapur : *Pushpon ki rani , main hastigatti chali*. Since Vidya was a dancer of

Bombay origin, in the story, the film director Nagaiah made her to sing songs in her tongue, Hindi!

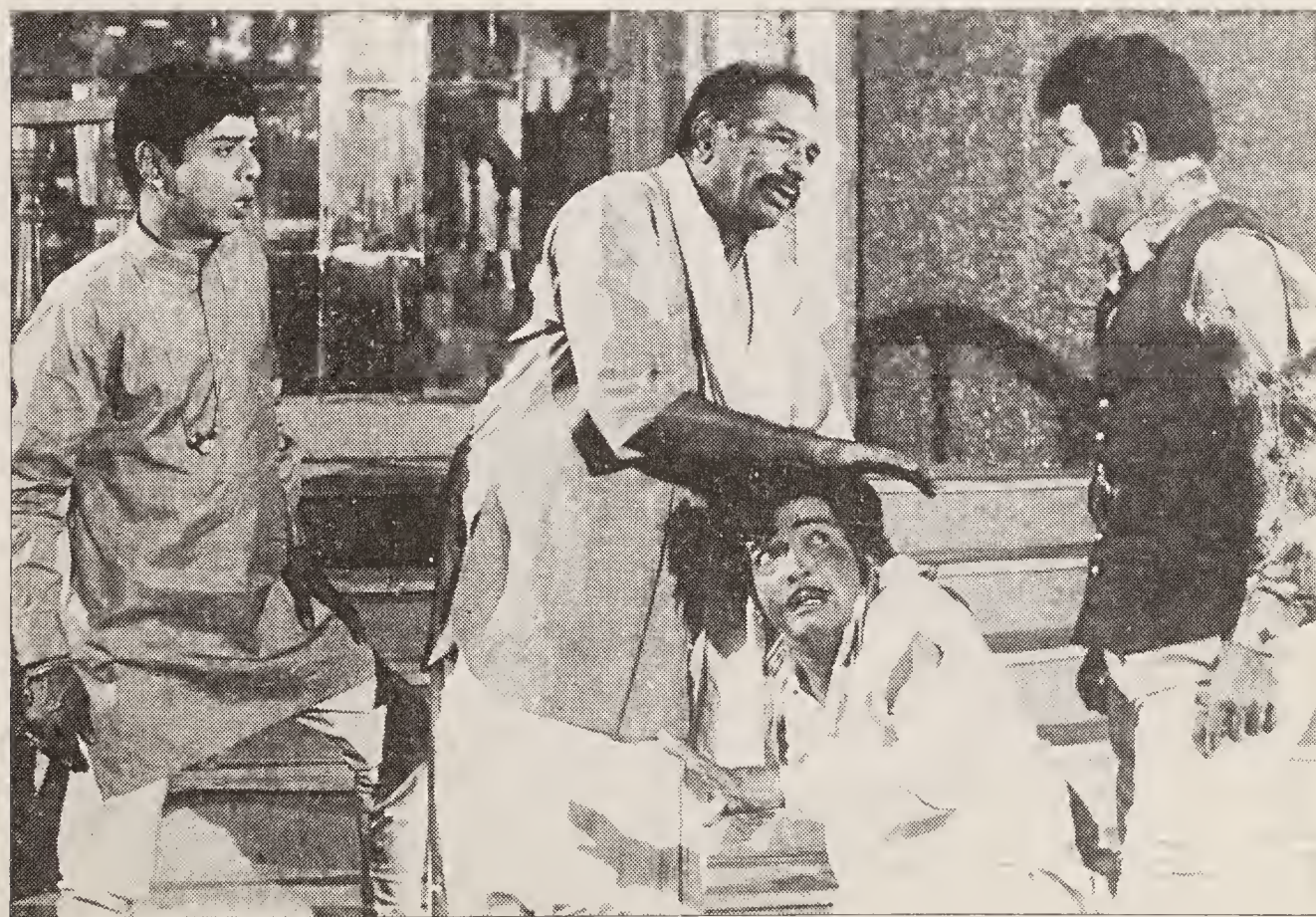
In *Thyagayya* Nagaiah introduced a Tamil song, which was sung by Papanasam Sivan and D. K. Pattammal. Not satisfied, he brought a beautiful bit of Hindustani in the same film, this time choosing a Mysorean melody, Jayavanti Devi to sing. There is a *Purandaradasa Devara Nama* (Kannada): *Ramanamava Japiso* in the very beginning of the film. This variety speaks for itself the firm footing Nagaiah had in musical intonations — apart from his capability to adopt music to the cinematic themes. At times, he was so fascinated with some songs of his own, that he brought repetitions of such compositions. M. L. Vasanthakumari's Javali, in *Na Illu*, composed by Nagaiah, for instance was very much skin to Bezawada Rajarathnam's *Idi Manchi Samayamu, Ra, Ra* — another Javali in *Kalyani Raga* which Nagaiah composed for *Bhakta Potana*.

While adapting songs, Nagaiah was very shrewd. *Adigananda Taravali Jagame Paaripoye* (*Devata*) is based on a Punjabi tune by Anil Biswas in his Hindi film *Alibaba*. Nagaiah's adaptation however, instead of being a mere adaptation, received an identity for itself.

The success of *Ezhai Padum Paadu* (Pakshiraja - 1950) made Nagaiah a household name in Tamil Nadu. This success enthused K. Ramnoth to assign Nagaiah for his *Vidudalai* in which a particular song, *Iraivane* sung by Nagaiah is an example of the innovative spirit that he used to bring into film songs.



Nagaiah as a Guest Actor



Nagaiah in a Tamil film with M.G. Ramachandran, Nambiar and Nagesh

By the time *Bhakta Potana* (1944) was picturised, playback singing was very much in vogue. The audience of yore were not very particular in the early days (and film makers too did not pay much attention) to lip synchronisation with sound. Nagaiah exploited the elbow room created by this. In *Bhakta Potana* Samrajyam dances to the tune of *Idi Manchi Samayamu Ra Ra*. Nagaiah, assigned Bezawada Rajarathnam to render the song in her millifluous voice.

Ramadasu contains songs which are akin to Baul music. For one thing, Ramadasu was akin to Sufi poets who preached pure cult of devotion. Unlike *Vemana*, who espoused a philosophy of life, Ramadasu's compositions lack serious music involvement, inasmuch as they were aimed towards this pure devotion. The story itself testifies that Kabir, a mystic saint imparted the *Taraka Manthram* to Ramadasu, which places Ramadasu and Kabir as contemporaries. Naturally the influence of Sufi saints was found in Ramadasu padams, which do not possess much of literary embellishments. In his film Nagaiah made use of some traditional Ragas like the Dhanyasi for rendering *Taraka manthramu korina dorikinadi, Dhanyudanaithini Rama*.

Taaru Maaru is Nagaiah's own piece recorded three decades prior to the film for a Gramophone Co. recording. The stage influences of that period spilled over into the music composition of *Ramadasu* even as he brought this piece to his film which only speaks of uncompromising stand Nagaiah takes towards maintaining tradition. The unusually long period that

elapsed before the film was released, and the necessity to delete many portions in the final version deprived viewers a good number of songs recorded by Nagaiah for *Ramadasu*. Tangaturi Suryakumari had two songs, rendered for the character of Tanesha's wife, which were sniped away by Nagaiah himself later. It is a pity that at least recorded versions of these songs are not available.

Conclusion :

There are at least thirty memorable songs of Nagaiah, out of about a hundred songs that he sung for the cinema. These are timeless classics in their own right. The songs are to be viewed in the context of the expertise that was brought into the renderings. Important among these are *Aasha Niraasha* (*Bhagyalakshmi*, 1943), *Sarvamangalanama* , *Nannu vidichi kadalakura*, *Pavanaguna Rama* (*Bhakta Potana*, 1944), *Rave Rave Bangaru Papa*, *Ennallundediha Sukhanulalo* (*Devata*, 1941), *Kanupinchumaya Mahadeva* , *Intena*, *Idena* , *Andalu Chindeti na Jyoti* (*Yogi Vemana*, 1947), *Nidhi Chala Sukhama*, *Endaro Mahanubhavulu* and other *Kirtana's of Thygayya* (1946), *Taraka Manthramu Korina Dorikithi* (*Ramadasu*, 1964), *Iraivane* (*Vidudalai*), etc.

Nagaiah's songs were universal in their appeal for they were never Tamil or Telugu renderings, but outbursts or pure emotion. Nagaiah had a flexible voice, inasmuch as he could bring into it a variety of emotions, without any trace of artificiality. In films like *Yogi Vemana* , Nagaiah stood apart as a singer par excellence. A

few like *Idena . . . Intena* , *Andalu Chindeti* are good examples of songs created with an eye for the ordinary viewer. In a scene from *Yogi Vemana* , we see Nagaiah confronting the death of a young sprightly girl, Jyoti. As her tender body is being consumed by fire, *Idena . . . Intena* is sung in the cemetery. Philosophy apart, the slow metre that was used to invoke the seriousness is very appealing; at one place, overwhelmed by grief, the voice breaks. This is something unmatched. It was not an artificial histrionic; instead it is evident that the artiste has taken pains to enter the soul of the character, undergo the travails before rendering the song. It is difficult to communicate feelings in a song in this manner. Nagaiah's success in this difficult art was a landmark.

Equally, in a lighthearted song in the same film, *Andala . . .* we come across pure melody imported from Bombay Talkie music. The humming after the word Jyoti is superbly executed, but at the same time reminiscent of Boral. It is a kind of melody which can be rightly raved upon. In *Thai Ullam* (Tamil, 1951) Nagaiah's exhibition of joy, celebration, is again a landmark, even as he brings forth pure joyous melody as he cajoles a three year old girl.

While working for other directors too, Nagaiah has left his imprint as a singer. For example in *Ethirparaathathu*, (1954), he sings that melodious piece *Oru thadavai sonnal* , to the music set by a younger composer. It has emotional lyrics. This emotion was kindled in *Ananda Bhairavi* Raga, resulting in an exhilaration melody. The way he moulded the song to fit the

character of the film, made it very communicative. This kind of marrying the song with the theme is evident even in small bits he sang in his later career. An example can be seen in *Swarna Manjari* (Telugu) - *Manalane Mangayin Bhagyam* , (Tamil), *Madhuramaina guru deevana*. For this bit, Nagaiah took meticulous care, irrespective of the fact that he was singing for another composer's music.

Both as a singer and a composer of music, Nagaiah brought a dynamism to south Indian film music without which it could not have been the sophisticated extravaganza that it is today. All the while he concentrated towards protecting tradition. That he adopted Hindustani styles to many of his cinema compositions can be attributed to the sound knowledge of the two streams of Indian music he had. Whereas Carnatic does not embellish long drawn *alapanas* and derives its melody through a judicious blend of music with lyrics, Hindustani takes pride in its *alapana's* . An artiste of Nagaiah's calibre understood these aspects well, before evolving a musical style for the cinema. It is in this adaptability that his strength lies. The ravages of time took toll of Nagaiah, even as the musician in him steadily came under the growing shadow of change — social, moral and aesthetic changes ! The later years saw producers making use of Nagaiah's imposing stature as a father-figure, the singing voice now drowned in the din and dazzle of technical strides and commercial considerations. Kamala Chandrababu recalls : " . . . he used to grieve over the present conditions. Sometimes, Nagaiah used to say that if at all an amount of sincerity is found it was in Ghantasala, who could be the carrier of his tradition " .

An avalanche of change erupted on the South Indian film scene. Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao achieved a name for himself as a singer after Nagaiah on the Telugu screen, while T. M. Soundara Rajan replaced Nagaiah and M. K. Thiagaraja Bhagavathar in Tamil. Even they had to retreat when younger versions took over. It was heart-rending to see that a singer of Nagaiah's calibre had to accept play-back singing for some of his roles like *Shanti Nivasam*. The best song which was akin to Nagaiah's own rendering was P. B. Srinivas' *Emi Rama Katha Sabari, Sabari* (*Bhakta Sabari*) for Nagaiah. But then the golden age had come to an end. In fact the voice of Nagaiah sang its swan song in *Vidudalai* (1954), incidentally invoking *Iraivane* (Almighty). In later years he sang in films like "*Pandunanga Mahatyam*" (1957), "*Swarna Manjari*" (1962), "*Poola Rangadu*" (1967). But none of these had the ephemeral qualities we found till "*Vidudalai*". Hence we can confidently point out that "*Iraivane*" was his swan song!

If one tries to sum up the contribution of Nagaiah to south Indian cinema song, it is easily discernible that he brought the song nearer to common man — at a time when such pursuits as love for music was considered a prerogative of elite. Even like the two Classical streams of music, Hindustani and Carnatic, Nagaiah's songs were of two distinct genres : Light songs which assimilated the influences from outside, and classical based ones which rigidly confined to the parameters of tradition. Slowly as changes overwhelmed, with the sophistication of song undermining the importance of melody based on tradition, Nagaiah's voice

receded into background and finally switched off. A new generation with new values overran the centre stage of Telugu cinema. the curtain came down on the music of Nagaiah.

Chapter 5

Thyagayya

METAPHYSICS to be metamorphosed into action — an action which has meaning beyond itself — is a challenge which many a biography of saints posed to the film makers. The gusto with which this challenge was met in the late thirties and early forties amply evidenced that at least in the hands of a few sensitive film makers such a possibility is not totally remote. Nagaiah was one such film maker.

At a time when mythological stories adopted from the stage-plays with their own limitations, were ruling the roost, Nagaiah's films, albeit through the baton of B. N Reddi had ushered a new whiff of air in socially relevant themes. But when Vauhini announced the filming of *Bhakta Potana*, it appeared as if the clock was being set back once again towards mythologicals. That was a naive conclusion. The rare kind of dedication that was found in the producers and artistes alike while producing *Bhakta Potana* and films of its ilk, were lacking in the produces of other

mythologicals. The film makes were aware that they were not picturising the life of a mythological character like Lord Rama, but a story of poet who brought the life of that Lord into Telugu poetry. There was, therefore, a purpose behind the attempt of filming biographies of Saints. These Saints showed the path to Bliss (Mukthi), and would it not be worthwhile to follow their lead ?

It is with this conception, that Nagaiah decided to produce his own film — the biography of saint composer *Thyagayya. Sangeetha Gnanamu, Bhakthi Vina, Sanmargamu kalade manasa* (Is there a way out (to Mukthi) without the knowledge of music, and devotion), questions a Thyagaraja *kriti* . It is this knowledge of music and devotion that was brought on to the screen through this biographical film, *Thyagayya*. The conviction which went into the effort turned the film into a major classic in the Telugu cinema history.

When Baburao Patel compared Nagaiah's acting calibre to that of Paul Muni, interestingly enough, he was making a point: Paul Muni is known for his acting stints in biographies. Nagaiah was fast towing his line, what with *Potana* already released, *Thyagayya* and *Vemana* to follow. Like the Western actor, Muni visiting the native town of Emilie Zola to stay there for over six months in a bid to understand — how Zola live, the environment which shaped Zola et al — Nagaiah followed a similar pattern. Before indulging in the task of script-writing. Nagaiah proceeded to Tiruvayyaru, the birth - place of Saint Thyagaraja, to invoke the atmosphere and breath the air which the Saint had lived upon.

A prolonged period in the vicinity of the Saint's *Samadhi* saw the progression of the script. Nagaiah brought an amount of sanctity to the story of Thyagaraja, for the simple fact that he was firmly entrenched in the belief that unless one is imbibed with divinity one cannot evolve everlasting musical compositions as Thyagaraja did.

The anecdotes that he chanced upon to weave the story of Thyagaraja, however, left an amount of vacuity — he was not convinced and felt more research was necessary. Visiting the Saraswati Mahal Library of Tanjore, now and anon, Nagaiah slowly unveiled the way the Saint had indulged in producing pure poetry and that too a poetry which is set to enchanting music. Retreating to Tiruvayyaru, Nagaiah continued his work. Reminiscent of his style when working on the sets of *Bhakta Potana*, Nagaiah slid into a puritanistic way of working — adopting an orthodox style which was eminently suitable to script the life of a Saint Composer like Thyagaraja. To an extent, this kind of transformation was easy for Nagaiah. With his orthodoxy of a Brahmin boyhood, he was already aware of such a living ; quickly adopting to this kind of life, viz., a ritualistic bath in the Cauvery river even as the sun rises in the east, proceeding in the wet clothes to *samadhi* and squatting to perfect his script, Nagaiah eschewed temptations around him as long as he was busy with the script work to Thyagayya.

Commitment to true portrayal of the life, did not mean sacrificing cinematic techniques. The script had to deviate from the known story of the saint. For one thing, life of Thyagaraja is

portrayed in different books in a variety of ways. For instance while *Sangeeta Kalapradarshini* by Aripirala Satyanarayanamoorthi, noted musicologist which is a veritable text book for many a student of Carnatic music, places the birth of Saint Thyagaraja at 1767; the Tamil publication *Sri Kriti Manimaalai* edited by R. Rangaramunja Iyengar and Veenai Vidushi Smt. Padma Varadan, places it at 1759. Thus even in the date of birth there are deviations from one text to another. There are no proven conclusions about the way the saint lived, even as every writer has exhibited his own inclination, rather than portraying truth. What all one can lay hands upon, is the treasure trove that the saint had left behind.

Steering clear of such variations, Nagaiah managed to strike a balance between the available material and the variety of legends attributed to the life of Thyagaraya. Needless to say, the image of a saint is always identified with miracles and other extra-human powers. Nagaiah considered that such miracles are only meant to hold the interest of masses, and one has to delve into depths to understand the meanings of so-called miracles. In the process, the film maker emphasised on the progression of Thyagaraya as a musicologist and underplayed the importance of miracles.

It would be pertinent to note the way he has handled this aspect of the script. The story of Thyagaraja talks about the refusal of the fledgling saint to accept the gifts sent by the king of Tanjore, Sharabhoji Maharaj, also known as Sarfoji Maharaj. The Tamil text quoted above, for instance, cites how the power of

Lord Rama made the soldiers who came to fetch Thyagaraja to King's court developing queer stomach ailment and retreating. The Telugu text similarly explains that Lord Rama himself appeared in the dream of king and rendered a Thyagaraya *kriti* to satisfy the whim of the ruler. Nagaiah brushed both the incidents aside, and conjured the scene by introducing the *kriti* ' *Nidhi Chala Sukhama* ' and leading the shot to his brother's jealousy and drowning the idols of Lord Rama in the river Cauvery.

Nagaiah handled the script in a consummate manner. Mudigonda Lingamurthy's reminiscences : " Nagaiah was very painstaking when it came to the script of *Thyagayya* . He was confronted with a dilemma in the scene where the King's men deliver the gifts, even as Thygaraja rejects them. Nagaiah was not able to readily conjure what should follow this shot. After prolonged arguments and days of thinking, Nagaiah came out with the following dialogue : ' After refusing to accept the presents, the camera pans to a close up of Japesam who expresses his chagrin by saying ' are you now happy, Thyagayya ' . I was confused. This looked too pedestrian. Having broken our heads for such a long time, I felt this was a disappointment. No, not quite. When the script-writer Nagaiah explained the nuances of this simple sounding sentence, I was overwhelmed . Hitherto his elder brother Japesam used to address Thyagaraja as *Thyagoo* . And today, with the refusal of the gifts, his brother addressed him as *Thyagayya* . This connotes that the refusal of presents has in fact elevated the image of young devotee in his own brother's views " . ¹

Placing the pertinent *kirti* , *Nidhi Chala* . . . here, the

script concentrates on the dramatic effect by bringing Japesam's jealousy to the fore — albeit an incident which many a book has ascribed to the saint. Nagaiah the script - writer has thus cleverly balanced the scrip, ensuring that while it does not deviate from the available legends on Thyagaraja, it also does not undermine the cinematic techniques.

While deciding the *kritis* of the film, — at least 28 of them find a place in this biography — Nagaiah's knowledge of the historicity of Carnatic music comes out to light. He pays his tribute to Purandaradasa by presenting this father figure of Carnatic music, through his composition right in the beginning of the film. As a fledgling musicologist Thyagaraja was groping with the compositions of others at this point of time . . . and verily such a Purandara Devara Nama, places the character of Thyagaraja in right perspective.

Thyagayya's music

Nagaiah attached an amount of divine importance to the life of saint composer Thyagaraja. This meant additional responsibility, for filming the life of Nada Brahma (Creator of the sounds of music), meant bringing to life the history of music. Thyagaraya, along with Shama Sastry and Muthuswamy Dikshithar, are considered the Trinity of Carnatic music. Thyagaraya himself is attributed with the compositions of as many as 2,400 *Kritis* (some even put the figure at 24,000, though we have only 2,400 compositions available), which are considered as the very essence of Carnatic music. This

necessitated acquisition of insight into the wavelengths of this genre of music. Fully aware of the fact that his knowledge in this area is limited, Nagaiah recognised the need for preparatory work. To ensure the traditionality in the rendering of the compositions is upheld, one of the primary tasks that Nagaiah undertook was to learn the music in all its nuances. Even here, he adopted a novel method. By listening to the renderings of veteran musicians, Nagaiah started to expose himself to the notes. Much later he started accompanying them in their renderings of the compositions. All this meant time — two long years in this process of learning brought an amount of aestheticity into Nagaiah's songs. In the process Nagaiah brought new values for cinema song.

Nagaiah reminisces : " Our Renuka Office was akin to a *sangeetha sabha* , nay a temple. During this period of learning, some of the noted singers like Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu, Mani Iyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Bangloare Nagarathnamma were with me. They used to daily expose me to Thyagaraya *Kritis*. People called our office as *Nagaiah Choultry* . During these two years of learning, our office was reverberating with the sounds of *OM*. Veritably, the Goddess of Learning, Saraswati, had come to stay in the portals of our modest office " ².

No wonder, *Thyagayya* became a classic of all times. A. V. L. Prabhakar, writing in *Anasuya* in its August 1947 issue, talks about Thyagayya's music thus : " Let us face a fact. Nagaiah was neither that kind to personality which we see as Thyagaraya-the-Saint portrayed in many a painting, nor is he a

musicologist who has assimilated the " Nada Brahama's music, for music was not his career. People who intimately knew Nagaiah the man would not vouch discerning even an iota of *Thyagayya* in Nagaiah. How come such a person can take up the role of *Thyagayya* , and literally live in that role? The music and acting calibre are the answers.

" To bring out the personality of Thyagayya, songs play an important part. Nagaiah has apparently digested the philosophy of Thyagayya, for he was able to dissemble the notes, loosen the knots of *taala* and render Thyagaraya compositions with an amount of purity and traditional conservatism, that here indeed is the emergence of a veteran musician. To this metamorphosis, Nagaiah's majestic voice helped the artiste considerably. Though Nagaiah was not a *bhaktha* in the real sense of the word, he was able to master the *bhakti-rasa* and present it to the audience" ³.

Nagaiah's love for music was turning into an obsession with him — for during the picturisation of *Thyagayya*, overawed by the violin notes of Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu, Nagaiah filmed 5,000 feet on Dwaram's presentation !

The director :

Nagaiah was, in the first instance, not keen on taking up the direction of *Thyagayya* . In fact he was looking out for someone who has scholarly knowledge of Carnatic music to conduct the film's course. B. N. Reddi and K. V. Reddy were both busy in their own films. " Chengaiah who was an assistant director to P. Pulliah in Nagaiah's earlier *Bhagyalakshmi* , however suggested

that I should take up the direction " ⁴, recalls Nagaiah, " and then came a variety of encouraging feelers from all around. I too was emboldened by these good words. More than anything, I had written the screenplay. I had mastered an amount of authority on the subject. I had also learnt the technique of directing films from my association with ace directors. With this background, I plunged into directing the film. I gave myself the role of *Thyagayya*, Lingamurthy became my brother Japesam, D. Hemalatha and Gubbi Jayamma were also signed ". It was at about this time Vauhini were filming *Swargaseema* in which Nagaiah co-starred with Bhanumati, Jayamma, Lingamurthy, while Nagaiah himself was looking after the music for that film also.

A critic commented . " It was something akin to *asthavadhanam*, that Nagaiah indulged in taking up the direction of *Thyagayya* ". This was an apt remark ; for one thing, he was an actor in Tamil cinemas (*Bhakta Jana*, *Chakradari*); he had to look for finances for *Thyagayya* ; learn music and compose notes for films, not only his *Thyagayya*, but also for *Swargaseema* ; and to crown these he was hero in *Swargaseema*; while K. V. Reddy was drilling into him the nuances of Vauhini's forthcoming *Yogi Vemana* . With all these distractions, he had to handle direction and play the lead role in *Thyagayya* . How did he fare ?

Both as a director the actor, *Thyagayya* proved to be a milestone in Nagaiah's career. He was able to bring the various evolutionary stages of the development of the philosophy of Saint Thyagaraya on to the screen. Thyagaraya's penance was a music-oriented one.

Thygaraya's evolution in stages into a venerated *Nada Brahama* and the way Nagaiah has treated these evolutionary stages needs a comment. Thygaraya was a disciplined devotee to begin with, when he was groping for words and notes. Every song he composed was a stepping stone towards perfection. But how many days will he go on groping in this fashion. The second stage traces Thyagaraya developing a philosophical penance. Nagaiah was able to bring about this aspect in an aesthetic manner. In this second stage music becomes a yearning, a desire and with that desire, perfection becomes perceivable, even as the mysteries of sound are unravelled; and then the saint receives enlightenment — to enlighten the world. It is this third stage which draws apart the veils separating the intellect and heart. Nagaiah was able to bring this effectively in the film by selecting the *Kritis* of Thygaraya to reflect the evolution. The final stage is when every word that Thyagayya utters becomes *Pranavanaada Sudha Rasam*, the very essence of music. Nagaiah, as the director was at his best in determining and dissecting these stages of the saint's evolution and bringing them out on the screen — an attempt which has been unmatched by the latter film makers, despite the sophistication that has been inculcated in moviemaking. That Nagaiah was able to present a dreamy tranquility in Thyagayya is sufficient evidence to prove the sensitive director that he was.

***Thyagayya* heralds a cultural revival :**

Nagaiah, covertly helped a revival of tradition in this part of

the country. One of the greatest contributions of the film *Thyagayya* was that it made the common viewer appreciate the nuances of classical Carnatic music. Visiting a concert was the prerogative of the elite, of the pundits — and this was usurped by the common man, thanks to the interest created in his heart by the music of *Thyagayya*. But there were not many concert halls for everyone. Mylapore had a concert hall in Madras those days, where music-lovers used to flock. As Nagaiah was standing outside this hall after a particular concert of G. N. Balasubramaniam, torrential rains lashed. As he was entering his car, he noticed many ladies returning from the concert in pouring rain. There were about 80 persons. Nagaiah offered to transport them in so many trips; and having done this, he went to Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and other noted singers of the day and mooted the idea of starting a *Thyaga Gana Brahma Sabha* and build an auditorium in Thyagarayanagar itself. Soon, with generous contributions from Nagaiah himself, it took shape and came to be known as *Nagaiah Hall*. However, Nagaiah prevailed upon the governing body to name the auditorium as *Vani Mahal*. With the success of *Thyagayya*, a number of such Thyagaraya Gana Sabhas bloomed all over South India, and today many a town in Andhra sports — with an amount of rightful pride — such auditoriums where regular music concerts are presented. The film itself was released when the Centenary Celebrations of Thyagaraya *Vardanthi* were afoot.

Press and public took notice of *Thyagayya* in an unprecedented manner. The Maharaja of Mysore, known for his love for Carnatic music, arranged a special screening of *Thyagayya*

in his palace and honoured Nagaiah with 101 gold coins in a silver salver. He also presented a gold necklace with Lord Rama's pendant. Similarly, Maharaja of Travancore invited Nagaiah to his Court and performed *pada pooja* to the artiste, apart from honouring him with the tile *Abhinava Maha Thyagaarju*. Nagaiah reminisces : "What better recognition can an artiste aspire for? "

Andhra Jyoti (now defunct) edited by Nagi Reddy and Chakrapani, brought out a special issue on *Thyagayya* to commemorate the success of the film.

As far as Nagaiah was concerned, it was not merely receiving — for he never believed in such selfishness. He always shared the good things. Nagaiah donated a Music College building to Thiruvayyaru, apart from donations to a variety of music-oriented activities.

It is apt to recall B. N. Reddi's tribute here : " In Nagaiah, I verily saw an *avtar* of Thyagayya. I cannot forget how I used to shed tears — like an overwhelmed baby — when Nagaiah rendered Thyagayya's keertanas. Indeed those were the loftiest moments of my life " ⁵.

Chapter 6

The Film-maker

NAGAIAH'S production team presented four films, spread over the entire career of the artiste, as if portraying the rise and fall of the actor, director and the man. *Thyagayya*, which was a class apart, launched him as a film director, while the earlier film *Bhagyalakshmi* made him a producer of movies.

Nagaiah was in the throes of a dilemma, which was instrumental in driving him to film production. On the one hand, he was verily in love with the roles that Vauhini assigned to him — in fact, he has gone on record saying that he was nursing a fear that Vauhini may not give him the role of Potana, but to the outward circle of friends he used to concede that he is being deprived of the glamour. This apprehension led him to directly involve in film production.

For his maiden venture; as a film producer, Nagaiah took over two main streams : acting as the hero — let us not use the word protagonist for this particular role in *Bhagyalakshmi*, for

Nagaiah conceived the script in his romantic image and moulded in his imagination a sacrificing young hero in love with the girl next-door — besides, writing the story. That the script smacks of ideological stances moulded in romantic pattern was not an excuse for careless handling, though, as the later script writers have tried. In Nagaiah we see a meticulous care for details. Says Pulliah, who was entrusted with the direction of the film " . . . and Nagaiah would not even accept to discuss the script with artistes, till the final shape is determined. " ¹ The script itself was a reflection of the groping stances of Telugu cinema themes of yester years. Conceived as a domestic drama, the film was replete with melodrama.

Romantic in its approach, Nagaiah was concentrating on projection of an all idealistic hero in himself. No wonder, he turned out to be a goody-good young man, intelligent, music loving — there you are, the musician in Nagaiah making his presence felt — teacher ! Nagaiah ensured that the teacher becomes a music pundit. Yet another love of Nagaiah, theatre, is accomodated inasmuch as the young Bhagyalakshmi is seen as a frequent participant of school plays — here again ample room for songs — reminiscent of his own development in to a stage artiste. Portraying the orthodox stances of the period, parents of the girl consider such forays of young girls into the stage as a *raison d'etre* spoiling the chances of possible marriage — the *summum bonum* of any girl's life was " marriage " those days, as it unfortunately continues to be. The theatre was a taboo, a historic fact, as far as women were concerned. Nagaiah himself had donned female roles on the stage for want of ladies coming

forward to take up such characterisations. To that extent the director introduced social commentary, but such feelings were drowned in the way the lover, an innocence - incarnate, was conceived.

Pure melody that was available to us in *Thinne meedi Chinnoda*, or *Chestanu Pelli Chestanu* carried the influence of many years of stage experience, though we have to believe by the title cards that it was Bhimavarapu who scored the music. That Nagaiah was the factor behind determining the ways songs are to be composed cannot be disputed.

At best Nagaiah's first film proved to be a testing ground for his own production unit and the response spurred the artiste towards greater goals. Paradoxically enough, *Bhagyalakshmi* was a product of Nagaiah's apprehensions, that he is fast becoming an archetype. When Nagaiah went on to producing his second film, this time he himself was wielding the magaphone, *Thyagayya*, confirmed the Saint-Poet character on him — well, it was as if, he himself provided an opportunity to become what he feared Vauhini was making out of him !

Bhagyalakshmi's romanticism blossomed into devotion — a quantum jump by any standards, — for when *Thyagayya* was being produced there were many critics to point out that a romantic hero like Nagaiah might not suit *Thyagayya's* role. P. Pulliah talks about this romanticism : " In *Bhagyalakshmi* he had a role of a sacrificing lover ; the way he rendered songs for the film still lingers in my mind. With that kind of personality, if Nagaiah is convincing as a hero, it

only reflects the acting skill. Let me emphasise, when Nagaiah despite his stature, acted in tender romantic scenes, it never was out-of-place. Whatever the role he takes up — he used to bring life into them ".

Thyagayya proved the mettle of Nagaiah the actor and Nagaiah the director. Later he was seen in an epoch - making film *Ezhai Padum Paadu* of Pakshirajas. This Tamil film (though its Telugu version also appeared) prompted Nagaiah to think in terms of producing a movie which would cater mainly to the Tamil audience. *Thyagayya* had amply proved his ability as a filmmaker who can handle direction, script writing, acting and music composition all by himself and secured foundation for a great artiste in the annals of film making. It was on this foundation he built his *En Veedu* (My home). Once again, his skill in a variety of sections of film making were put to test.

Nagaiah conceived *En Veedu* to expose people living in high places, cheating the glibble. He weaved the film in the fibre of an investigative theme. The script-writer ensured at every turn the music-loving Nagaiah's hand is seen, nay heard, even as the story conceives the children of Shivaram, the protagonist (well, Nagaiah's hero has slowly turned to be a protagonist !) as aspiring musicians. The director, Nagaiah, has taken ample care to weave music into the film in an aesthetic manner even as a full fledged classical music concert is introduced in the film, in all its traditional format. Classical singers like M. L. Vasantakumari were assigned songs.

The film proved to be a mature handling of a domestic

theme. Here again, an honest, idealist hero was shaped by Nagaiah, but by now the pure romantic imagery—approaching life with an amount of sensuality—was given a bye, and constructive disposition was taking its place.

Press took great notice of the film. The following free translation of a review which appeared in *Kinema* (February, 1953), gives an insight into what Press felt about the film:

" The year 1953 has begun well with a Telugu / Tamil presentation, *En Veedu* (*Na Illu* in Telugu). It is after a considerable lapse of time Nagaiah has taken up the production and direction responsibilities. The film is an enthralling experience to any cinegoer.

" The lover of music that Nagaiah is, he has introduced into the story Radio programmes, in the name of *Balananda Sangham*. Radio Akkayya and Radio Annayya are his products. His love for Carnatic music has been once again demonstrated amply. During the course of the story, he brings in the names of well known musicians like Parthasarathy Sabha President, Hari Nagabhushanam, Dwaram Venkatswamy Naidu, etc. Viewer also goes on a trip to interesting places like Kalahasti, Nellore, and Vijayawada. Nagaiah has brought an amount of reality into the film, and the story is identifiable with common people. The dialogues are pleasing *Gobbilla Pata* and the play *Lava Kusha* in the film are extremely well presented. Nagaiah, Lingamurthy, T. R. Rajakumari, have acted as if they were in an acting competition. Vidyavati, a new comer, has undertaken a very difficult role. The entire film sounds with the rhyme and rhythms of

music, which however does not jar.

" Nagaiah's clever manouvering of the script to ensure that songs are not out of place is commendable. *Adigadigo Gaganaseema* is indeed a very pleasing melody " ².

Na Illu which gave fillip to the children's programme in All India Radio, even as Balananda Sangham presented in the films were adopted by the Radio stations. It is appropriate to recall what Nagaiah feels about the films for children.

" It is necessary that we should work for bringing about a scientific temper in children. This cannot be achieved through mere prescription of a number of books. In fact may I bring to the notice of readers, that I was one of the pioneers to introduce Balananda Sangham into Radio programmes, after our country gained independence ; I evolved a project for bringing out children's films, which I submitted to the then Central Education Minister, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and carried out extensive correspondence. The result is what is presently known as today's *Children Film Society* . . . This is the age of Cinema. Most of our children see films. Some of them, repeatedly. Recognising this potential, it is necessary to bring on to the screen stories of great men, so that in their imitation, they will be following the steps of great men, thus educating themselves. " ³ (Ironically, Nagaiah was not blessed with progeny).

Nagaiah ignored the financial warnings that *En Veedu* sent, primarily owing to the comfortable position that he was enjoying as an actor, and went ahead with production of yet another film *Ramadasu* .

Ramadasu can be cited as the culmination of the artiste's efforts to bring forth biographies of saint poets on to the celluloid. Having successfully brought out *Thyagayya* , and contributed to *Bhakta Potana* , and *Yogi Vemana* , it was a life time ambition for Nagaiah to bring Bhakta Ramadasu's life on to the screen. At the time of announcing the film, Nagaiah was fairly in good position (1954), even as films one after another were bringing him monetary benefits. The loss that he had tasted in the production of *En Veedu* did not deter the artiste from his avowed path. Having convinced himself that even if he has lost on *En Veedu* , he could make up with the other films, he began his script writing work. Spurred by the journalist friend Eswara Dutt's enthusiasm that promised all help, Nagaiah conceived the film as the cinema world's effort to bring Hindu - Muslim amity — since Telangana provinces were reeling under Rajakar Movement. Eswara Dutt invited Nagaiah to Hyderabad. Nagaiah extensively toured Golconda, Bhadrachalam, Nalgonda, Nizamabad provinces, so that material for the script is gathered. With assistance coming from Burgula Ramakrishna Rao and Eswara Dutt, Nagaiah scripted the story. He read it out to a variety of leaders, both Hindus and Muslims, who acknowledged that the script was true to the traditionally accepted narration about the Saint Ramadasu's life. This is despite the fact that Nagaiah had made his own clever innovations, in an effort to elevate the image of Ramadasu. On his return to Madras he consulted Samudrala Raghavacharya and the script took a definite shape. The journalist friend who had assured him help from Nizam Government for production, had however to retreat. Nagaiah

was left to himself to raise finance for the film.

Treatment of the script by Nagaiah ensured that the image of Ramadasu is not in any way hampered. While the original story tells about Ramadasu using the Taluk Treasury funds for renovating the temple of Lord Rama in Bhadrachalam, for which the Tanesha of Golconda imprisons him, Nagaiah brought in an innovation. That his pleadings to allow Kabir, the visiting Sufi Saint to Bhadrachalam, into the sanctum sanctorum, makes the temple authorities unhappy and they feel disgruntled over the initiative taken by Ramadasu, then called as Kancherila Gopanna. Later in the story he brings in a character called Alladdin, who out of the malice borne by the temple authorities is made to ignore the request of Ramadasu to inform Tanesha about the money being spent on the construction of temple. By infusing this incident — with all dramatic content in it — Nagaiah ensured that the image of Ramadasu is not tarnished. The film when released proved to be a wee-bit out of date. Time had taken its toll. A decade in the production line was too long a period. Values had changed. Though it celebrated 100 days run in many a centre, heavy financial investment, consequent loans and writing away of negative rights to money-lenders, landed Nagaiah in further debts.

Ramadasu is a classic example of what dedication meant to artistes of yesteryears — artistes who were strangers to the commercial culture that was creeping in. Their aim was to produce an artifact, irrespective of the troubles and travails such efforts may bring in. The film along with his earlier three biographies carried the stamp of the archetype of a Saint on Nagaiah.

Chapter 7

The Human Being

NAGAIAH was a man of rare calibre. He is remembered for his humane qualities. This nature lead Nagaiah to consider every artiste as a representative of divinity and never did he differentiate from person to person, artiste to artiste. To him everyone, however big or small was primarily a human being. Every facet of his personality — that of an actor, a sensitive singer, music composer, director, film-maker and above all a personification of human values, is remembered with love and respect. Not only did he captivate the audience of Telugu and Tamil languages, his influence reached every part of South India. Kannada fans, for instance, had developed an extreme likeability towards him. This was evident in the way his Tamil film *Ezhai Padum Paadu* and earlier Telugu films *Vandemataram*, *Devata*, *Sumangali* , and Nagaiah's own *Thyagayya* and *En Veedu* celebrated Silver Jubilees in Bangalore ! Nagaiah is remembered by Mysoreans as their own representative. Looking into the pages of Kannada periodical *Kinema*, it was surprising to notice



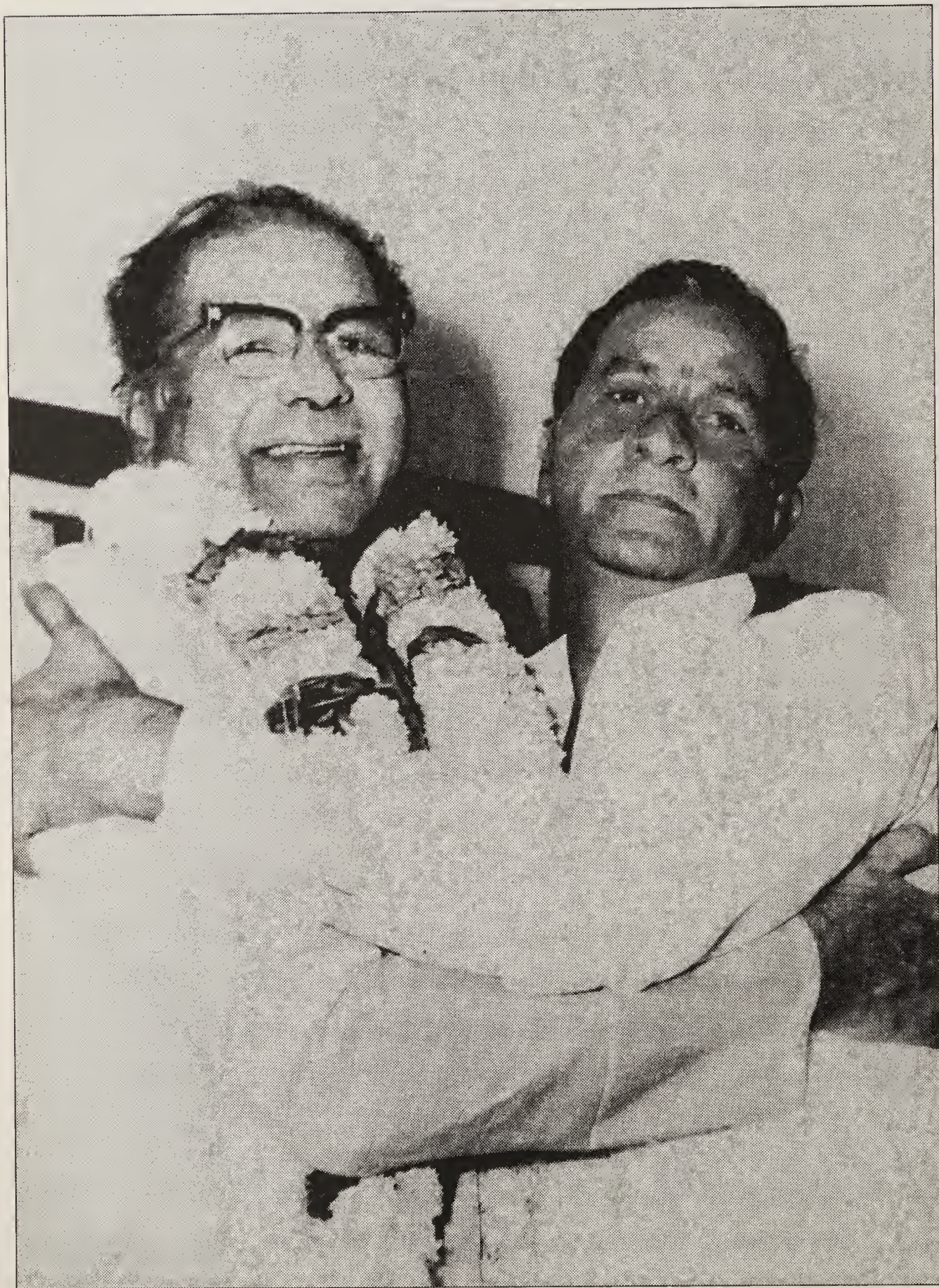
Nagaiah with Gummadi, Chalam, Nagesh and others taking a break from the shooting

how they reacted to Nagaiah's films. To cite an example, one Mohanrao from Mangalore writes in the feature *My favourite star* in *Kinema* (Kannada), thus : " As a script writer, music director, director and above all a singer, he excelled in Our India's *Na Illu* . He excelled Kidar Sharma and Kishore Sahu in his performance. Though his films are as lengthy as 19,000 feet, Nagaiah ensures that they do not bore the viewer. . . Nagaiah is an artiste who is loved by the entire south Indian population " ¹. Such a comment in Telugu or Tamil periodical would have gone unnoticed, but it was something extraordinary for Kannada audience to pour over his qualities. But then, this is not a solitary case. Right through the pages of cinema periodicals during the period from 1950 to 56, we find such rave appreciation. But then, this is a feeling of common spectator, nay a fan ! What was he like in the eyes of his friends, colleagues and mentors?

An artiste evolves ; he goes through changes like any other person . . the seasons of a creative nature are conditioned by the seasons of the man himself. Apauperisation, enrichment, falling in love with certain styles and ideas . . . these changes are in the course of an artiste's life. What matters however is their importance in moulding the artiste's outlook. B. N. Reddi was veritably the mentor of Nagaiah. Thanks to Reddi's sagacious suggestion to H. M. Reddi, Nagaiah was assigned the keyrole in *Gruhalakshmi* . Nagaiah's autobiography speaks about the way Reddi used to prompt, guide, and chide him for his ways — naive and foolhardy. Reddi himself felt (writing in *Vijayachitra*, Jan - 1974) that there are very few actors who have an amount of divinity in them. "Nagaiah was one such. These artistes bring great

name to the country and the society at large. These artistes can bring immortality to mortals. Nagaiah used to enter the role of the characters he was enacting and live in that role. When one sees *Potana*, *Thaygayya*, *Vemana*, we are cajoled to believe that indeed here are those personalities in front of our eyes, in flesh and blood. Nagaiah was able to bring this kind of illusion "². Nagaiah himself, writing in *Vijayachitra* (Special issue, 1969), defined the artiste thus : " A human being is an artiste by birth. An artiste is endowed with an amount of divinity, which achieves a finesse as the man grows with age and consistent work, practice and good company. It is then left to the artiste to use his art to promote prosperity all around. His art becomes verily a tool of inspiration to others. He can shape many a patriot " ³.

" As an actor, he lived in the roles " , echoes Balanthrapu Rajanikantha Rao. Rao had worked with him during the production of *Swarga Seema*, while Kamalkara Kameswara Rao an assistant director in Vauhini who knew Nagaiah intimately recalls, " I never felt that Nagaiah was acting. It was so natural and true . In Vauhini he was a hero and I worked as an Assistant Director for a number of films, including *Potana* and *Vemana*. His was not acting. He was blessed with the felicity to become veritable character he was portraying. While doing the role of Potana, I recall . . Potana is a rustic devotee. One had always imagined this poet as a lean personality. Sometimes we conjure images of great personalities, don't we? How come, Nagaiah with his very heavy built can take this role and do justice? Those who have seen the film will discount the fears expressed — in fact



Nagaiah with Pulla Rao

Nagaiah's skill in acting changed their view and they started to envision Potana in Nagaiah's mould ! Whatever happened to his bulk? "

Mudigonda Lingamurthy, a dear colleague of Nagaiah, (they used to address each other as *Baava*), paying a tribute to the actor Nagaiah has this to say: " I can cite an example to his acting calibre. The scene is the concluding part in *Yogi Vemana* , which was being picturised. Vemana will leave the society to enter the cave. In the multitude of people gathered to bid farewell, Vemana's brother and sister-in-law are also there. They all prostrate before Vemana. With the relationships now having been pushed into the oblivion, Nagaiah flashes a smile and leaves them. While filming this scene, the entire team on the sets including the light boys, camera crew, sound people, were shedding tears — and that was the emotions he could evoke. In fact, in my 35 years of acting career, I have not seen an entire team being moved to tears like this "4.

Gummadi Venkateswara Rao, a versatile actor himself, who played the role of Potana in a later version was all apologetic when he wrote, " Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the then President of India wrote to me, after seeing my Potana thus: " when I saw you as Thimmarasu I was extremely pleased. But when I saw your *Potana* I am afraid I had to change my opinion. You have disappointed me as Potana . Many friends shared this feeling. In fact I confided to Nagaiah himself, telling him, ' after seeing your *Potana* , Mummadvaram Balayogi became a Yogi and went into *samadhi* . If he sees my *Potana* , he would come back from that

samadhi ! " ⁵. On another occasion, speaking in a function organised to felicitate K. Satyanarayana, with Chittoor V. Nagaiah Award for best Actor in 1986, Gummadi said, " In fact the Award should have been given to me. I was the artiste who showed to the world that there was a way to spoil the *Potana* portrayal perfected by Nagaiah."

Nagaiah commanded a rare respect among his colleagues. " During the final callsheet of *Ramadasu* ", recalls Rallabandi Kameshwara Rao, " NT Rama Rao and Shivaji Ganesan were Rama Lakshmana on the sets. Shooting having just completed, Shivaji prostrated to Nagaiah's feet and took hold of his hands saying *Appa, naan poyittu varren* (can I take leave of you, father ?)⁶".

" I feel the present day singers have not attained the maturity of Nagaiah. They just cannot sing like he did ", vouches P. Pulliah, who directed Nagaiah's film *Bhagyalakshmi* . As a singer, Nagaiah ensured for himself a place which is envied by one and all, for none have come up to the standards set by him. Ghantasala Venkateswara Rao, who took over the reins of Telugu song and conducted it for well over two decades, paid his tribute when Nagaiah passed away, thus : " *Vandemataram, Gruhalakshmi* and other films took cinema music to the threshold of common man — and to this feat Nagaiah's contribution is very significant. There was something fresh in his renderings. Any singer to excell in his songs, should have experienced *rasaanubhuti* , which is the crux ; only then, a song would have achieved, in every sense of the word. The melody that Nagaiah brought into his songs, were to an extent adopted by



Nagaiah with his wife Jayalakshmi

me, about which I am really proud. " ⁷. Continuing in the same vein he acknowledges that it was in *swargaseema* that he sang for the first time with Bhanumati under Nagaiah's direction. " What did I learn from those music composers of yesteryears like Nagaiah? Well, all that I have learnt from them have hoisted me into a singer . . . "

P. Adinarayana Rao, a renowned music composer recalls: " Nagaiah brought a newness into Telugu cinema music. The way that Nagaiah showed became the veritable highway by which many later composers lead their music. His music was verily the lullaby for Telugus, who saw in Nagaiah a new kind of enchanting genre. That was his speciality. Apart from Telugu, his music became popular in Tamil speaking areas too. " ⁸

V. A. K. Ranga Rao, film music critic, notes: " Vauhini's music steadily turned into classical oriented. This was because of the reason that Nagaiah himself who had a knowledge of classical Carnatic music, was at the helm of conducting the music. To this, the organisation's inclination towards good music also supported. Indeed it was the Golden Age. " .

If Nagaiah is remembered fondly, it is not merely because of his contribution to the various fields of South Indian Cinema. He is affectionately recalled for his human qualities — qualities which also led him to financial down-fall. After a lapse of three decades, people remember him and his charity. Many magazines in Telugu carry fond memories and remind readers of the man and his generosity. One such anecdote appeared in a newly instituted cine magazine " Shivaranjani " in its February 1987 issue: Chalapati Rau writes : " When Nagaiah was filming



Nagaiah and his wife Jayalakshmi celebrating Nagaiah's birthday

Thyagayya , for a scene in which Thyagayya arranges a *Santharpana* (feeding of Brahmins), he required about 200 Brahmins. He could have made up junior artistes as *Brahmins* and shot the scene. But, our Nagaiah sent his Production Managers to the villages in Coastal Andhra, and asked them to bring Brahmins from such places as Gangalakurru Agraharam, Katranikota, Vyageshwarapuram etc. He treated these pundits, orthodox but poor Brahmins with respect and accommodated them in his Renuka Office and other three offices. Having arranged the feeding ceremony, he shot the scene in which real Brahmins ate in a real feeding ceremony. While sending those Brahmins back, apart from giving them new clothes, he also paid such a remuneration to each one of them that those poor people could live happily of six months! And this is only an example of his charity-oriented activities "9.

In a world of appearances Nagaiah emphasised reality.

P. Pulliah recalls: " As an individual, Nagaiah was an exemplary man. His good-nature and philanthropy came to the rescue of many a poor person. Anybody who went to his portals with a request, has not come back without his affectionate help. He used to help whatever his circumstances were. And this bent of mind to a great extent undid him — for he was unable to save something for himself. I cannot vouch whether almighty is all-kindly towards human beings, or unkind. If we consider Nagaiah was acting till almost his day of death, we could thank God for his kindness. But then, even in that state of health Nagaiah had to act in any role that comes his way and this makes us to infer God in

unkind !... Even on his death bed, Nagaiah was optimistic. ' It is a matter of two days . . I'll be all right ' - echoed Nagaiah's optimism even during those last minutes. Nagaiah was not merely an actor — he was a great artiste. He was not merely a man . . a human being par excellence ! " ¹⁰

P. Bhanumati, recalls Nagaiah's disposition in these words: " Nagaiah is like my own father. He was particularly fond of me. I had the opportunity of acting with him in some Telugu and Tamil films, which I considered as my good fortune. In *Swargaseema* , as if foretelling the future, he blessed me ' Days to come will see you as a great artiste '. In fact that blessing has become a reality today. In my films *Vivaha Bandham* , *Anta Manchike* etc. he has appeared as my father. It is a historical fact that individuals and institutions alike, after having established themselves, will perforce vanish in the annals of time. Nagaiah — who earned lakhs and lakhs of rupees, finally had to face economic difficulties and condescend for acting in minor roles is only a quirk of fate. He spent all that he earned for charities and was an ascetic in his life " ¹¹.

Inturi Venkateswara Rao , a journalist friend of Nagaiah, who was instrumental in establishing the Bronze Statue of the artiste in Panagal Park, Madras, which was installed with great fanfare on 28th March 1977, recalls the qualities of man in Nagaiah : " Let us not forget that Nagaiah had to enter into indebtedness to meet the commitments he unwittingly made to political friends. Being an artiste, he had kept away from the ' business of living ' . He was cheated by friends who had tasted the benevolence



Nagaiah performing rituals on his birthday



Sathya Sai Baba blessing Nagaiah couple

offered by Nagaiah. Even then, Nagaiah would not point out that these people were instrumental in bringing losses to him. In fact his house was a veritable pilgrim centre for all those who have lost their purses or who are hungry ! They would rob his purse too ! The way he has contributed to political leaders requires special mention. Believe it or not, when Andhra Pradesh was formed, Nagaiah took a loan of 20,000 rupees to donate to Andhra Kesari Prakasham Pantulu. Today there are any number of industrialists in Andhra Pradesh, who had tasted the fruits of charity by Nagaiah" ¹². No wonder, Nagaiah's mentor, B. N. Reddi at one stage remarked, " By indulging into activities which would not help him in any way, Nagaiah could not wholly dedicate himself to the cause of art . . . let us pray to God that once again that kind of artiste will take birth again! ", and having said this in anger he reiterates : " Since I have great belief in man, I know Nagaiah would not mistake me for having pointed out this . . . wherever he is , he would not mistake me, for even like a child Nagaiah is unaware of the business of living in this world ! "

And we can go on and on remembering the qualities of Man in Nagaiah. No wonder, Nagaiah is considered as the very essence of human being among artistes, friends and colleagues.

SYNOPSIS

GRUHALAKSHMI

(Black & White, 1938, Telugu)

Production : Rohini Pictures

Story, dialogues, & Lyrics : Samudrala Raghavacharaya

Music : P. Satyanarayana

Camera : K. Ramnoth

Art & Sound : Sekhar

Studios : Kartikeya

Direction : H. M. Reddy

Cast : Nagaiah, Gowripathi Sastry, Ramanujachari, Subbarao, Kannamba, Kanchanamala, Sarala, Mohini.

Synopsis:

Madhuri, a danseuse, manouvres Dr. Krishan Rao's visit to her house with the help of a poor Branhim Pundit. Soon Krishna Rao ignores his wife and becomes Madhuri's lover. To please her he entangles himself in indebtedness. Gopinath, his brother-in-law tries to wean him away from the woman and the vices he has developed, without success. Now an alcoholic, he starts living with Madhuri. His father, just before death, assigns his property

to children of Krishna Rao and appoints Viswasa Rao as attorney.

Sastry in a fit of anger kills Viswasa Rao, but manages to bamboozle the doctor, that it was he who had killed Viswasa Rao. Dr. Krishna Rao believes so since he also had flourished his gun at Viswasa Rao. His wife becomes a destitute, even as the doctor flees from police. Gopi harbours her. She tries to plead with Madhuri, but when she pushes her from the staircase, Radha becomes demented. An accident to Madhuri leads to a confession from her and the estranged Radha and Dr. Krishna Rao are united. Gopi leads them to Harijana Ashramam. The film ends with a prayer to Gandhiji.

Nagaiah's sensational debut included the two hit songs "*Kallu Manandoyi*" (eschew drinking), and the upbeat nationalist "*Lendu bharata Veerulara*". The film's style moulded Vauhini Pictures' later melodramas, which are considered the classics of Indian Cinema.

The film was adopted from a popular stage play "*Rangoon Rowdy*"

VANDEMATARAM

(Black & White, 22200 feet, 1939, Telugu)

Production : Vauhini, Pictures

Music : Nagaiah

Screenplay & Camera : K. Ramnoth

Sound : A. K. Sekhar

Direction & Story : B. N. Reddi

Cast : Nagaiah, Kanchanamala, Lingamurti, Kalyani, Sheshamamba, Usha, Rani, Sriranjani Sr.

Synopsis :

Foiling the attempts of his parents to extract dowry, Raghu marries Janaki. Janaki's mother-in-law nurses a hatred towards the girl and tries to create misgivings at every turn. Janaki delivers a baby, which only accentuates the difficulties of Raghu, who having met failure at every step migrates to city in search of a job. Luck awaits him, even as he purchases the Derby ticket, " Vandemataram ". The ticket brings him Rs. 5 lakhs. With this unexpected Bonanza Raghu returns with his newly found wealth, only to find that Janaki has been ousted from his house, even as

his mother paints a sob - story about the girl leaving the house. She persuades him to remarry. Raghu refuses and takes up social work, including building factories. A college - mate who is a rich female gives him helping hand, which provokes gossip, and their going together on the streets is interpreted as illicit love. Raghu who is now a owner of many a factory, comes to be seen by Janaki, now a flower-seller. She too mistakes his relationship with his friend. She concludes that her husband has married that girl. A chance meeting of the husband and wife clears the misconception. They live happily everafter. A major hit, the film engages nationalist agenda; "Vandemataram" is the name of the Derby Ticket, for instance. In a sequence Raghu (Nagaiah) tramples underfoot his 'foreign' degree which caused censorship problems.

SUMANGALI

(Black & White : 17,540 feet, 1940 Telugu)

Production : Vauhini, 17,540 feet

Story, Screenplay, Camera & editing : K. Ramnoth

Music : Nagaiah

Dialogues : Samudrala Raghavacharya

Sound : A. K. Sekhar

Studio : Newtowne

Director : B. N. Reddi

Cast : Nagaiah, Kumari, Giri, Malati, Lingamurthi, Seshamamba, Doraiswamy.

Synopsis :

The film is about a love triangle. Sathyam, who has just appeared for I. C. S. Examination is attracted towards Saraswati, where as his close relative, Parvati is inclined towards Sathyam. Sathyam does not respond to Parvati's love and instead moves towards Saraswati. Saraswati, was however, a widow , for as a victim of child marriage she had lost her husband even before she could understand the meaning of the word ' marriage ". Saraswati

is kept out from knowing this truth. She grows into a lady sans the memories of the traumatic experience. Slowly the truth dawns upon her. Though Satyam apparently cannot marry the widow Saraswati, Parvati sacrifices her love and unites Sathyam and Saraswati in wedlock.

VISWAMOHINI

(Black & White ; 17600 feet, 1940, Telugu)

Production : Sri Jagadish Pictures

Lyrics : Balijepalli Lakshminata Kavi

Art : T. V. S. Sarma

Music : Ogirala Ramachandra Rao

Studio : Newtowne

Direction : Y. V. Rao

Cast : Y. V. Rao, Nagaiah, Lalitadevi , Bezawada Rajarathnam, Rangaswamy, Kakinada Rajarathnam, Doraiswamy, Gangarathnam, Sampurna, Suryanarayana.

Synopsis:

Purushottham has embezzled considerable money from Andhra Brokers Company, owned by Padmanabham where he is working as a Manager. . Purushottham is trying to marry his son Mohan Rao to Hemalatha who is the only daughter of a millionaire Vishalakshamma. Hema too has a soft corner in her heart for Mohan.

Pasupati, a film director and brother of Visalakshamma

introduces Viswamohini, a cine star. She is Padmanabham's daughter. Padmanabham is now apauperised through the vices of Purushotham and this means his daughter Sushila is forced to seek a career in cinema, who changes her name into Viswamohini.

The love affair between Mohan and Viswamohini gets a sanction from Padmanabham who however poses a condition that Mohan should first find a job for himself. Mohan tricks Padmanabham into a belief that he (Mohan) has landed in a job. Viswamohini marries him and bids a goodbye to her cinema career.

Hema comes to know about this marriage. She utilises the absence of Mohan one day and accuses Viswamohini. Viswamohini, undaunted teaches her a lesson, by rejecting the money offered by Hema. When Mohan returns, he finds Viswamohini missing. The story traces the travails of lovers and their union.

Nagaiah plays the role of a film director Pasupati in this film.

MAHATMA GANDHI VAZHKAI

MAHATMA GANDHI JEEVITAM

(Black & White Documentary, 1940, Tamil/Telugu)

Production : A. K. Chettiar

Tech. Director : Dr. P. V. Pati

Recording : Behram Wadia

Commentary : Tapi Dharma Rao (Telugu)

Songs : Nagaiah, Kannamba, Bezawada Rajarathanam, T. Suryakumari.

A. K. Chettiar known as the ' world-wide traveller ', presented this film on Mahatma Gandhi's life . *Ananda Vikatan* (a Tamil Weekly published from Madras,) in its 8 - 7 - 1940 issue says about the film in the following words :

" This film is unlike usual features, starring actors and actresses. They have collected the real incidents that have marked the life of Mahatma Gandhi and ably documented them into an inspiring film. These collections are from different sources, picturised at different times, and it goes to the credit of producers who have brought out a meaningful story out of

these various sequences ".

Nagaiah contributed to the film as a singer along with Kannamba, Bezawada Rajarathnam.

DEVATA

(Black & White, 1941, 16,750 feet Telugu)

Production : Vauhini

Story, Scenario, Photography : K. Ramnoth

Music : V. Nagaiah

Art & Sound : A. K. Sekhar

Studio : Newtowne, Madras

Director : B. N. Reddi

Cast : Nagaiah, Lingamurthy, Kumari, Bezawada Rajaratham, T. Suryakumari.

Synopsis:

Venu returns after studying Barristership from London. He is considered as a prospective husband of Vimala by her father. Meanwhile Venu is found attracted towards a maidservant in the household, Lakshmi. Venu seduces Lakshmi. She becomes pregnant. Venu tries to hush up the affair by offering money, but Lakshmi refuses to accept the purse. Vimala on the other hand is in love with Sukumar and she elopes with him one fine morning. The story tells about the travails of Lakshmi, and her child, even

as Venu confesses his guilt and after a long search brings her back into the household — this time as his wife.

Assessment :

Reproduced is a free translation of review that appeared in July 20, 1941 issue of *Ananda Vikatan* (Tamil magazine, published from Madras). (B. N. Reddi's *Vandematharam*, *Sumangali* and *Devata*, had the distinction of getting good reception in Tamil speaking areas).

" Oh . . . Gods and Goddesses ! We wanted to portray you as heroes and heroines in our films. That's what we promised when we produced talkies. No God / Goddess objected to this. We went ahead. Then we came down to Puranic characters — on to Bhaktas, Mahajans, Zamindars, Crorepatis and to common man.

" But none had thought of a servant-maid to be the heroine of a film. No one was interested to portray her lot. Vauhini's have done that. In *Paragon* Talkies, you can see the film. Yes, we can also, indeed it is true, hear the songs and dialogues in *Paragon* Theatres — something has been done there !

" It is refreshing to see the Barristers's sister addressing the maid servant as *Lakshmi* . Once we call them by their names, servants will be prepared even to give their life. Venu (Nagaiah) is a first-class actor. When he is mentally suffering, he did not sing as per formulas or tradition — not even a word! He conveys everything thorough facial expressions. Bezawada Rajarathnam's songs are an asset. When Ramnoth and Sekhar are in charge

there will definitely be class — some rural scenes satisfy and cool the conscience. Not that there are no flaws. That Gypsy dance and song was not necessary. But then, kudos to Vauhini's trinity."

ASHOK KUMAR

(Black & White , 19,000 feet, Tamil, 1941)

Production : Murugan Talkies, 19,000 feet

Dialogues : Ilangovan

Music : Alandur Sivasubramanian

Photography : Jiten Banerji

Direction : T. R. Raghunath & Raja Chandrasekhar

Cast : Nagaiah , M. K. Thiagaraja Bhagavathar, Kannamba, Kumudini, M. G. Ramachandran, N. S. Krishnan and T. A. Madhuran.

Synopsis:

Gunalan Returns to the Kingdom after a war. He is introduced to Thishyarakshithai. Thishyarakshithai knows that Gunalan is in love with Pramila, though at first she is not very keen on Gunalan, — she even tries to stop the *Yuvaraja Pattabhisekham* ceremonies, but even as she comes unwillingly to apply the mark of *tilak* on Gunalan's forehead, a sudden change occurs in her mind and she is enamoured by the dignified bearing of Gunalan. When she happens to see Gunalan and Pramila happily singing in the palace, Thishyarakshithai burns

with love and hatred simultaneously.

One day while Gunalan is singing, Ashok Kumar — his father and the King — leaves the place on an urgent work. Thishyarakshithai senses that a good opportunity had arisen and she tries to enrapture him. Gunalan instead chides her and asks her to behave. Precisely at this moment, Ashok Kumar returns. Thishyarakshitai however paints a different picture to Ashok Kumar and accuses Gunalan having attempted a seduction. Ashok Kumar exterminates his son Gunalan together with his lover Pramila, and orders blinding of both the eyes of Gunalan.

Gunalan becomes a mendicant and happens to meet his father Ashok Kumar on a fine morning in a faraway town. The story moves towards resolving the misunderstanding.

(For Memorabilia : M. G. Ramachandran appeared in a minor role as Mahendran in this film. Ranjan, the stunt hero of later period, who achieved phenomenal success in *Chandralekha* , made his debut into films through this Tamil movie).

BHAGYALAMSHMI

(Black & White, 1943, Telugu)

Production : Renuka Films

Story : Nagaiah

Dialogues & Lyrics : Samudrala

Music : B. Narasimha Rao

Art : S. V. S. Rama Rao

Sound : A. Krishnan

Camera : M. A. Rehman

Direction : P. Pulliah

Cast : Nagaiah, Doraiswamy, Umamaheswara Rao, Giri, Raghavan, Gowripathi Sastry, N. S. Krishnan, T. A. Madhuran, Malati, Suryakumari.

Synopsis:

Srinivasa Rao, (Nagaiah) is all goody-good young man, intelligent, music loving teacher. He nurses in his heart tender love towards the neighbour, Bhagyalakshmi, who however, like many an Indian female of that age, is just unaware of anything called love. She is married off by the parents to a young person

arranged by her uncle Kotaiah. The hero leaves the village, goes in search of peace. He is accosted by a lambada girl, who tries to woo him. Again he flees from her and when finally he returns, a vamp Kamakshi, a colleague of his yesteryear teacher days pleads with him to marry her.

Srinivasa Rao refuses. Kamakshi floats a rumour that Bhagylakshmi and Srinivasa Rao have illicit relationship. Viswanatha Rao, (Bhagyalakshmi's husband) is shaken by the rumours all around and asks Bhagya to leave the house. Srinivas Rao happens to come to the house at that moment, and pleads on her behalf, which strengthens Viswanathia Rao's doubts. Bhagyalakshmi is thrown away on the streets, with her child.

Srinivas as a sacrificing young man, clears the doubts and the estranged couple is united after many a hardship. Nagaiah's classic song "Asha Nirasha" is a highlight of the film.

BHAKTA POTANA (TELUGU) 1944

(Black & White, Telugu, 1944)

Production : Vauhini

Music : Nagaiah

Dialogues & Lyrics : Samudrala

Photography : K. Ramnoth

Director : K. V. Reddy

Cast : Nagaiah, Malati, C. Hemalata, Vanaja, Samrajyam, Gowrinatha Sastry, Lingamurthi, Ch. Narayana Rao

(Production Supervision : B. N. Reddi

Producer : T. Lakshminarayanawamy,

Production Secretary : Lingamurthi).

Synopsis :

Bammera Potanamaty, a resident of Ekasilanagaram, who loved simple life, is an ardent devotee of Lord Rama. His wife Sarasamamba is a sister of contemporary poet Srinatha. Potana has two children, Mallana and Lakshmi. Srinatha has a daughter , Sharada, who spent a lot of time in Potana's house. In fact Sharda

is considered as a member of Poatana's house, while Sarasamamba was treating her as their future daughter-in-law.

On a lunar eclipse, the poet is busy with his rituals, when Lord appears in front of him and directs him to translate *Ramayana* and dedicate the work to him. Potana commences the work of translation from Sanskrit. While the first seven *skandas* (Cantos) are written with great felicity, Potana could not easily complete the 8th Skanda. Knowing his difficulty, Lord Rama himself visits the household in the guise of Potana, when the real Potana was away and completes the verse.

Srinatha, on his way back from a sojourn, happens to visit Ekasilanagaram. Lakshmi casually mentions about the books that her father is writing. She also recites a verse or two from the book and Srinatha informs the king about the magnificent book in the making. The king requests Srinatha to prevail upon Potana to dedicate the work in King's name. Srinatha becomes an emissary on the subject. Potana does not accept the proposal. Srinatha is ordered by the King to see that the work is dedicated to him. Srinatha returns once again to Potana and when Potana does not relent, Srinatha has a way out. " Unless Potana dedicates the work to the King, he would not give his daughter in marriage to Mallana". Mallana is hurt by this turn of events, but rebuts Srinatha saying that he can give his daughter to anyone he fancies. Far from achieving his objective, Srinatha gets into bad books of his relatives. The King develops a sort of jealousy on Potana, and challenges that even if it is by force, he would see that the work is dedicated to him. He orders that the book be brought to him by

force and for this purpose assigns his soldiers. When they approach the house of Potana, they encounter Hanuman, chanting the name of Rama and threatening the soldiers. He orders his Chief of Army to go to Potana and exterminate him after taking the Bhagavata book from him.

Meanwhile Srinatha brings pundits, Brahmins and other influential section of society to prevail upon Potana, to no avail. The soldiers enter the household and read out the extermination order. Potana leaves the house with his wife and children. The King's men could not even touch the book. Everytime they come near it, they experience a variety of discomforts. The King once again refuses to accept these incidents, and asks his men to destroy Potana's house. Instead of Potana's cottage crumbling, with every blow it receives, the King's palace itself is destroyed. Knowing the ways of God, the King prevails on Potana to return home and go ahead with his translation work.

SWARGA SEEMA

(Black & white, 10,296 feet, Telugu, 1945)

Production : Vauhini,

Story & Dialogue : Chakrapani

Lyrics : Balanthrapu Rajanikanta Rao

Photography : Marcus Bartley

Screenplay : B. N. Reddi

Music : Nagaiah

Direction : B. N. Reddi

Cast : P. Bhanumati, Nagaiah, B. Jayamma, Lingamurthi, K. Shiva Rao

Synopsis :

Murthy and Kalyani with their two children are the very picture of contented family. Into the quietude a tempest blows in the form of a dancer, Subbi, who temporarily snatches Murthy away from Kalyani. Murthy helps her to become a dancing and singing star Sujata Devi. Murthy deserts his wife and children and sets a new home. Not for long, the flippant Sujata looks out for a better person.

THYAGAYYA

(Black & White, 17,000 feet, 1946, Telugu)

Production : Renuka,

Story, Scenario & Music : Nagaiah

Camera : M. A. Rahman

Sound : Dinshaw K. Therani

Art : Raju and Nagoor

Dialogues : Samudrala

Studio : Newtowne

Direction : Nagaiah

Cast : Nagaiah, Lingamurthi, Lakshmirajyam, Jayamma, Hemalatha, S. V. Rajyam.

Synopsis :

Thyagaraju, an ardent devotee of Lord Rama, is of the firm belief that the way to *Mukthi* lies in music. Serfoji Maharaja of Tanjore was a patron of music and other fine arts. Thyagaraja keeps out of various functions organised by eminent musician and invites the wrath of pundits. They point out that he is fast becoming a wayward. His brother Japesha, chides Thyagayya to

put to use his talent and lead a life of dignity. In the domestic front too, Japesha's wife nurses a jealousy towards Thyagaraya's wife Dharmamba. Japesha tries to get Thyagaraya appointed in the king's court.

Thyagayya is struggling to perfect his music. He is unable to invoke the melodies in his compositions. Humiliated by the derision of pundits, Thyagayya kneels before the idols of Lord Rama and pleads to show him a way out. Narada in the guise of an old Brahmin enters and presents *Swarnarnava* — a treatise in music. With this he achieves a command over the notes and every word that comes out from him turns to be the very tone of music. Thyagayya is invited by the Tanjore Guru. Thyagayya renders *Endaro Mahanabhavulu* in front of him. The news reaches Serfoji Maharaj. Thyagayya rejects the King's offer. Japesha is irked by this act. Kamalamba instigates Japesha to get rid of those idols of Lord Rama. Lord Rama appears in Thyagayya's dream and directs him to the place where the idols are lying. The story traces the death of Thyagayya's wife, his pilgrimage to Kalahasti, Kovvur, Naagapura and finally the symbolical reaching of Lord Rama's feet, signifying physical death.

YOGI VEMANA

(Black & White, 15741 feet, 1947 Telugu)

Production : Vauhini

Music Direction : Nagaiah

Assisted by Ogirala Ramachandra Rao.

Dance Direction : Vedantam Raghavaiah

Photography : Marcus Bartely

Sound : T. Arasu

Art : E. Nagnoor and S. V. S. Rama Rao

Editing : Jambulingam, B. V. Koteswara Rao

Studio : Newtowne

Cast : Nagaiah, M. V. Rajamma, Parvatibai, M. Lingamurthi, Kantamani, Baby Krishnaveni, Ramireddi, A. Seeta, K. Doraiswamy

Direction : K. V. Reddy

Synopsis :

Vemana's elder brother Anavema Reddy is the local lord of Moogachinappalle, under Kondaveeti Gajaveera kings. Anavemareddy and Sarasamamba are pious, and tradition

oriented. Vemana is opposed to such beliefs and has his own way. For Vemana, young girl in the house, Jyoti, (his brother's daughter) is a dear soul. The only other person who has stolen his imagination is a sensuous *dasi* . Vemana has a good friend in Abhiramayya, who is busy in formulating gold with the help of old texts. Vemana is apprehensive of his success, but at the same time he hopes that if his efforts materialise, gold will be useful for his concubine, Ratnavali. Ratnavali is ever demanding. Emerging out from Ratnavali's house he meets Abhirama who cajoles him to accompany him to the temple. On the threshold of the temple, Vemana sees an old woman shivering in the cold. He takes her into the temple, and walks right into the sanctum sanctorum, snatches the cloth covering the idol and drapes it on the old woman. Priests were agog with objections, for which he replies, " When a person in blood and flesh is dying in the cold, we cannot afford an idol to be clothed ". This was considered as an outrage, and a ritual to cleanse the temple is undertaken by the priests. Vemana is chided by Sarasamaba, when he is seen playing with Jyoti, unmindful of what havoc he has created. Vemana replies " If idols are gods, they verily eat money ". Sarasamamba requests him to help his brother and become a useful person. Meanwhile, Ratnavali notices a diamond necklace aglitter in Sarasamamba's neck when she visits the temple, and demands that it should be brought to her. Vemana tries to wriggle out, but Ratnavali's demands had to be met. When Vemana reaches the household, Jyoti is ridden with fever. He squats near the child, singing a lullaby and forgets about the necklace. After a few days, he steals the jewel and gives it to Ratnavali.

He and his friend abhirama successfully formulate gold. But when he comes home to see his niece Jyoti, his only real friend, dead, he finds no value in gold. The film dissolves her face on to a skeleton, set to the song '*Idena inthena*'.

Vemana becomes a mendicant and advocates the ideology of rationalism.

MANADESAM

(Black & White, 1949, Telugu)

Production : Prasad Productions

Lyrics : Samudrala

Music: Ghantasala Venkateshwara Rao.

Camera : M. A. Rehman

Direction : L. V. Prasad

Cast : Nagaiah , Narayanarao, N. T. Rama Rao, Relangi, Vangara, Ramanatha Sastry, Krishnaveni, Kanchana, Hemalatha, Balasaraswati.

Synopsis :

Shoba is a critic of Congress Party. On a visit to Agraharam, she gets into vocal outbursts with Madhu who is a sympathiser of Congress. When she returns to Madras, Yashoda and Madhu also travel with her. Soon Shoba is attracted towards Madhu. Shoba witnesses the travails of young Madhu at the hands of police, and she also participates actively in the freedom movement. Madhu's relative Ramanatham is arrested, while Yashoda, Madhu's mother also courts arrest. Later Madhu is also arrested.

Madhu returns home when Congress takes over the reins of the country. He is however demented now due to police torture. An accident brings back Madhu's memories. Shoba and Madhu are united in wedlock.

NAVAJEEVANAM

(Black & White, 15,494 feet, 1949, Tamil)

Production : Sri Raja Rajeshwari

Lyrics : Kambadasan, Nagaimani

Photography : P. Ellappa

Editing : N. K. Gopal

Music : S. V. Venkataraman

Dances : Anil Kumar & Vedantam Satyam

Direction : K. B. Nagabhushnam

Cast : Nagaiah, Mahadevan, Kannamba, Annapurna, Sriram, S. Varalakshmi, Kamala, T. A. Jyalakshmi, Vanaja.

Synopsis :

Mahadevan, a playwright, is an avowed Gandhian. His younger brother, Prabhakar, is a student of B. A. Mahadevan and his wife Annapurna are very affectionate towards Prabhakar. Kamala and Vanaja both are in love with Prabhakar. Kamala, however, manages to steal Prabhakar's attention. Prabhakar unheeding Mahadevan's advice marries Kamala. Soon after the marriage, Doraiswamy Mudalair father of Kamala, a rich

industrialist, passes away. The management of the family and the mills falls on the shoulders of Prabhakar. He requests his brother to live with them. Even though they start living with Prabhakar, their way of life undergoes no change. After assuming the charge of the mills, Prabhakar starts illtreating the workers, and goes to the extent of exhibiting his arrogance in front of Mahadevan.

Kamala too has taken a disliking towards Annapurana's presence and starts quarrelling with her. On one occasion Prabhakar slaps Annapurna's face and the couple leave Prabhakar's house.

Soon Kamala is disenchanted with her husband and starts ignoring Prabhakar, while taking interest in ladies club activities etc. Vanaja is waiting in the wings to ensnare Prabhakar. Kamala notices this and utters unpleasant words to Vanaja. Prabhakar in a fit of anger beats his wife, and pushes her down the staircase. The glamour of Vanaja too wanes as Kamala changes her lifestyle and Mahadevan and Annapurna are back with the family.

BEEDALA PATLU
EZHAI PADUM PAADU

(Black & White, 17,786 feet, Telugu & Tamil, 1950)

Production : Pakshiraja

Story : Siddhananda Bharati

Music Supervision : Nagaiah

Music Direction : S. M Subbaiah, T. Aswathaama

Orchestra : Pakshiraja Studio

Dance : Rangaraju

Playback : M. L. Vasanta Kumari, P. A. Perianayaki, Trichy Loganathan

Cast : Nagaiah, T. S. Balaiah, T. S. Dorairaj, S. Shyama, N. Setharaman, Lalitha, Padmini, Kumari, N. Rajam, P. S. Gnanam, S. R. Janaki.

Dancers : Ragini, Thanigam, Radha, Kalyani, Rita, Janaki,

Direction : K. Ramnoth.

Synopsis :

Konda is imprisoned for having stolen a piece of sweetmeat from a shop. He escapes from jail, but inspector Javar

traces him and he gets another 10 years term. Floods wash away Konda's hut, rendering his wife, Rajam a destitute. She joins a Circus Company, but becomes a victim of Ramgopal, who foresakes her after impregnating.

Konda returns after the jail term, and on the very day of his return he rescues inspector Javar from a dangerous situation. Konda goes to the ashram of Saadhu Uttaman, for his meal. But Konda indulges in robbing Sadhu Uttaman and is again arrested. Uttaman however requests the police to pardon him and takes him to his house where he offers more silverware together with a book on how to make a living by manufacturing mirrors. Konda is affected by his good nature, and flourishes in his new business to become a Mayor of the town. He changes his name to Karunakaran. Rajam is employed in his factory, but she is dismissed to some rumour-mongers. In a chance encounter Javar sees Karunakaran rescuing Venkatadri — which reminds him of the way Konda rescued him and nurses a doubt in his heart. Rajam now a beggar happens to meet Ramgopal, who turns her out on the pretext of a mad woman. Javar locks her up in the jail. Karunakaran, having come to know the plight, rescues her from the police, which strenghtens Javar's doubt. Meanwhile, Javar arrests an innocent person and names him as *Konda*. Karunakaran comes out of his shell and accepts that he indeed is Konda, and rescues the innocent man. Karunakaran is arrested by Javar, while Rajam faints and subsequently dies. Karunakaran in a fit of rage attacks Javar and escapes to a neighbouring town from the jail, where he changes his name to Puruashothaman. Lakshmi, daughter of Rajam is now 10 years old, and has developed friendliness

with a collagemate Umakantan. Umakantan is a freedom fighter and had thus gained dislike of his grandfather Chowdhury who turns the boy out of the house. Karunakaran, during a visit to Umakantan's house chances upon inspector Javar and tries to flee away from the town. Karunakaran receives a SOS message from Umakantan saying that his life is in danger, and when Karunakaran reaches the place, he sees inspector Javar being manhandled by students. Karunakaran rescues Javar, while Anjali in a bid to save Umakantan, dies in a bullet injury. Umakantan is also hurt, whom he takes on his shoulder and starts walking. Javar follows him — but then Javar is now a changed person. He has been rescued by Karunakaran twice. After uniting Lakshmi and Umakantan, Karunakaran comes to Javar — but by then Javar has committed suicide. Karunakaran having demonstrated that love is more valuable than anything else, passes away contentedly.

EN VEEDU

NA ILLU

(Black & White, Tamil & Telugu, 1953, 17,245 feet)

Production : Our India Films

Story : Devulapalli Krishna Sastry

Music : Nagaiah (assisted By A. Rama Rao)

Dialogues : Y. Lakshminarayana

Camera : M. A. Rehman

Hindi Songs : G. S. Kashyap and Mohan

Playback : Nagaiah, M. L. Vasantakumari, R. Balasaraswati, Lalita, Meena Kapur,

Cast : Nagaiah, M. Lingamurthy, Ramasharama, Gopalakrishnan, A. V. Subba Rao, K. Doraswamy, T. R. Rajakumari, Girija, T. R. Rajakumari, Girija, Vidyavati, Chaaya Devi, Master Krishna, Lakshmi.

Director : Nagaiah

Synopsis :

Shivaram, a bank employee in Madras, was known for his honesty and good - nature, which had made him a trusted idealist

in the eyes of his employer. His wife, Sharada, is a model house-wife. The couple were nurturing fond hopes to bring up their children, Gopi, Hari and Lakshmi into great musicians. The bank owner, Sundaram Chetty had accommodated his brother-in-law Dhanaraj in his Bank, mainly due to the pleas of his wife, who had always been arguing in favour of her brother. Dhanaraj was not only a spendthrift, but had nurtured many vices. He had a concubine, Leela, a dancer. Dhanaraj considered Sivaram as an obstacle to fulfil his ambitions.

Sundaram Chetty comes to know that the price of gold is likely to increase manifold and hence he despatches Sivaram with currency of five laks to buy gold, before the prices shoot up. Dhanraj sends Leela to bamboozle Sivaram and relieve Sivaram of the money. Leela succeeds in her heady endeavour. With the help of a Bombay friend, Harish, Sivaram is beaten and when he loses consciousness, he is laid on a railway track. But by a quirk of fate, Sivaram escapes and Harish meets with an accident, in which he is reduced to pulp beyond recognition. Police conclude that the man who died in the accident was Sivaram. Sundaram Chetty offers help to Sivaram's family, believing that Sivaram has sacrificed his life in a bid to save his money. Sivaram comes to know about this, but goes underground since he has lost the money. Dhanaraju assumes overall charge in the bank and stops payments to Sivaram's family. The family is now on the verge of starvation; they lose their house too.

Sivaram's wife and children are virtually destitutes, but then Balananda Sangham comes to their rescue. Children grow up and

become good singers. Sivaram after years in underground, reaches Vijayawada and learns about a concert that his children are presenting at Madras. He goes to Madras, but while looking through the window of the house where his daughter's birthday was being celebrated, police suspect him to be a thief and try to take him into custody. Sivaram escapes and once again leaves for Bombay. The story traces the crimes of Leela, Dhanaraj and Harish and the way Sivaram exposes them.

GUMASTA

(Black & White, 16,912 feet, Telugu & Tamil, 1953)

Production : Aruna

Story : Acharya Athreya

Camera : R. M. Krishnaswamy

Editing : P.V. Manickam

Music : Nagaiah, C. N. Pandurangan, G. Ramanathan

Studio : Film Centre

Director : R. M. Krishnaswamy

Cast : Nagaiah, Manohar, Ramasarama , Pecketi Sivaram, Pandaribai, Jayamma, C. K. Saraswati.

Synopsis :

Ranganatham is a clerk earning a meagre salary, and responsible for a big family. His brother Gopi has been sent away from college for having not paid the fees. When circumstances were so dear, relatives descend. Even in this burden, he sees a hope that maybe the youngman in the relative's family might agree to marry their daughter. Even as they are reaching the house, they see debtors pestering Ranganathan and return without entering

the household.

Ravi, a heart patient who has been advised by doctors against wedlock, marries Sushila, Ranganatham's daughter. On the very first night of their marriage Ravi passes away after an attack.

Meanwhile Ranganatham loses his job. Sushila is in the family way, but the in-laws doubt her chastity, though she tries to impress on them of having spent the night with her husband when the attack came on and Ravi passed away. Sushila is sent back to Ranganatham's house. Ranganatham's wife is a maidservant now. Even as children pester him for an idol of Ganesh for celebrating pooja on Vijayaka Chaturthi, Ranganatham takes the children and drowns his daughter into the well, while the son flees. He is imprisoned.

The story traces the travails of Sushila, her daughter Rani, and how Sushila finally establishes her innocence. The film is an adaptation of Acharya Athreya's play, "*N.G.O.*".

VIDUDALAI

(Black & White, Tamil , 1954)

Production : New Era

Dialogues : Velavan

Lyrics : Velavan, Angamangalam Subbu, Arumugam

Music : Lakshman Raghunath

Studio : Film Centre

Direction : K. Ramnoth

Cast : Nagaiah, Manohar, Peer Mohammed, Ganapthi Bhatt, Krishna Kumari, Vimala.

Synopsis :

Periaswamy is an advocate adept in turning lies into truths and truths into veritable lies. His avaraciousness and over-ambitious nature receives a set-back when he receives the news of his brother having murdered Ayyaswami. Periaswamy is not disturbed, however; instead, to save the situation, he sends Chellaiah to Calcutta, and the murder charge is coolly rubbed off on a timid *juthka* (horse - cart) driver, Murugan, Peraswamy's brother Chellaiah becomes restless when he comes to know that

Murugan is sentenced to death. He pleads with his brother to get Murugan released. While Periaswamy is dodging the issue, Chellaiah gifts away the money he received from a lottery to Murugan's family and confesses his crime in a letter. He commits suicide, poisoning his wife Kalyani too. Periaswamy manages to get the letter in which his brother has confessed and tries to destroy this piece of evidence. From then on, the film examines in a psychological sense, the character of Periaswamy, even as the scheming advocate is finally obliged to confess his involvement in the crime, inasmuch as to hush up the same. Periaswamy is sentenced to undergo seven years imprisonment.

Review :

Vidudalai is a triumph of director K. Ramnoth. Nagaiah is seen in a different role of a villainish advocate. Reproduced is a review of the film which appeared in *Kinema* (Tamil periodical in its issue dated February 1954).

" Ramnoth has demonstrated that it is possible to present a good film in a short span of 6 months production. Presenting an absorbing story, the director has come out with the moral that *Truth prevails* . Nagaiah's acting skill is evident in his role as Periaswamy, while Manohar steals the show as Chellaiah. It is as if both were competing in exhibiting their histrionic talents. We come across many elitist criminals as portrayed by Nagaiah in this film. Indeed it is difficult to point out which was the best scene in the film, for each frame speaks of Ramnoth's directoral abilities and actor's skill. Manohar as Chellaiah has brought emotion into

good play. Peer Mohammed has given a peerless performance. Ganapathi Bhatt as a cook in Periaswamy's house entertains us with his recipes. Krishnakumari as Kalyani and Kumudini as Murugan's wife have given good performances. Velavan's dialogues are sharp and at times heart-rending. *Vidudalai* is a film with a message. Besides the film succeeds in driving home the message; its technical standard is high. As far as songs, Lalitha's song is a melody. Nagaiah's " Iraivane " has been rendered excellently."

MUDDUBIDDA

(Black & White, Telugu, 1956)

Production : Anupama

Story : Tapi Chanakya, Arudra,

Lyrics : Arudra

Photography : Laxmon Gore

Music : Pendyala

Studio : Venus

Direction : Tilak

Cast : Nagaiah, Laxmirajyam, Jamuna, Jaggaiah.

Synopsis :

Radha, who has lost her mother, is an epileptic. Gopalam, her father, suffers silently because of her ailment. Doctors advise Gopalam that maybe marriage might cure the disease. Avataram arranges a groom. Madhu is a pampered brother of Seshaiyah, who works in a Zamindari family. Madhu is a student of medicine. After obtaining his degree, he desires to practice, but Seshaiyah implores upon him to set up a clinic in a village. It is

at this juncture marriage is arranged. Seshai ah was not aware of Radha's epilepsy. Within a couple of days after the marriage, Radha suffers an attack. Madhu is disturbed.

Peramma, a distant relative disturbs the family by pointing out that Seshai ah has cunningly married Gopalam to an epileptic. Radha's attacks are now more marked and frequent. Sitamma (Seshai ah's wife) notices that whenever that symptoms of attack are evident, if a child is brought to her, the attack subsides. She feels if Radha looks after Gopalam's son Venu, maybe she would get better. Radha thus brings up Venu. Venu befriends with Peramma's son. Radha tries to get Venu away from the bad influence of Naraya. Peramma, however, brings quarrels aplenty. The story deals with the way the family reconciliation is brought about, while the epilepsy is cured by the *Muddu bidda's* (pet child) presence.

Comment :

K. S. Prakasha Rao's *Deeksha* , which itself drew inspiration from *Bindure Bhare* and *Chnota Bhai* , (Hindi), brought about a series of films, like *Maa Gopi* (Nagaiah and Jamuna); *Muddu Bidda* , *Valartha Pasam* (Tamil) etc . , which dealt with doting brothers, and pampering children. *Muddu Bidda* influence many Kannada films.

RAMADASU

(Colour, 19600 feet, Telugu, 1964)

Production : V. N. Film

Story, scenario : Nagaiah

Music : Nagaiah assisted by Aswathama, Padmanabha Sastry, Ogirala Ramachandra Rao.

Photography : M. A. Rehman

Cast : V. Nagaiah, Kannamba, Gummadi, Lingamurthy, C. S. R. Anjaneyulu, T. Suryakumari, Rushyendramani, A. V. Subba Rao.

With guest appearances of

N. T. Rama Rao, Sivaji Ganesan, A. Nageswara Rao, Anjali Devi, Relangi,

Direction : Nagaiah

Synopsis :

Gopanna of Nelakondapalle, having lost his father in a very tender age, was brought up by his mother. At the time of her death, Gopanna is adopted by his maternal uncles Madanna and Akkanna, who are Prime Minister the Defence Minister respectively in the Golconda Court. Kamala, daughter of Akkanna,

is said to have been destined in her horoscope, to either lose her husband or the husband will undergo a jail term. Unmindful of such predictions, Gopanna marries Kamala. Raghurama is born to them.

Gopanna visits Bhadrachalam for the annual festival in which the idols of Rama & Sita which Dammakka has installed are taken round the town. He notices the temple authorities objecting a Muslim devotee, Kabir, from entering the sanctum sanctorum, when the idols suddenly disappear. Gopanna requests all the devotees to ask the pardon of Kabir. The temple authorities too seek pardon. The idols reappear. However, they are not happy at the initiative of Gopanna.

On his return from Bhadrachalam, when he was feeding guests during a ritual his son Raghurama slips into a near by well. Gopanna and Kamala seek the help of Kabir. Kabir's prayer is answered and Raghurama is restored. Kabir then imparts the *taraka mantram* to Gopanna, and names him " Ramadasu ". Ramadasu vows to build a proper temple for Lord Rama at Bhadrachalam.

Later Ramadasu is appointed as Tehsildar of Bhadrachalam by the Tanesha. Allauddin conspires with the temple authorities, who had a score to settle, to take a revenge. He sends out a message that Ramadasu is using the treasury money for constructing a temple for Lord Rama. He informs that King's treasury money is being misappropriated. Tanesha becomes furious and arrests Ramadasu and brings him to Golconda jail.

Ramadasu while in the jail, composes a number of songs, pleading, cajoling and even threatening Lord Rama for having given him this *reward* after his efforts to build a temple for him. When despair and frustration are overtaking Ramadasu, Lord Rama appears in his dream and tells that he has settled his dues. At about the same time, Tanesha also dreams of Lord Rama paying him the money. When awake, Tanesha sees money in front of him. He sets Ramadasu free. The film ends with the *Kalyanam* of Lord Rama in which Tanesha also takes part.

FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Name of the film	Language
1938	<i>Gruhalakshmi</i>	Telugu
1939	<i>Vandematharam</i>	Telugu (Also Music : V. Nagaiah)
1940	<i>Sumangali</i>	Telugu (Also Music : V. Nagaiah)
	<i>Vishwamohini</i>	Telugu
1941	<i>Devatha</i>	Telugu (Also Music : V. Nagaiah)
	<i>Ashok Kumar</i>	Tamil
1943	<i>Bhagyalakshmi</i>	Telugu
	<i>Chenchulakshmi</i>	Telugu
1944	<i>Bhakta Potana</i>	Telugu (Also Music : Nagaiah)
1945	<i>Swarga Seema</i>	Telugu (Also Music : Nagaiah)
	<i>Meera</i>	Tamil ,Telugu & Hindi
1945	<i>Hemareddy Mallamma</i>	Kannada (only music director)
1946	<i>Thyagayya</i>	Telugu (Also Music, Direction : Nagaiah)
1947	<i>Yogi Vemana</i>	Telugu (Also Music : Nagaiah)
	<i>Chakradhari.</i>	
	<i>Bhaktajana.</i>	Tamil

1949	<i>Manadesam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Navajeevanam</i>	Tamil
1950	<i>Ezhai Padum Paadu</i>	Tamil
	<i>Beedala Patlu</i>	Telugu
1951	<i>Sarvadhikari</i>	Tamil
1951	<i>Thai Ullam</i>	Tamil
1953	<i>En Veedu</i>	Tamil (Also Direction and Music : Nagaiah)
	<i>Na Illu</i>	Telugu (Telugu version of <i>En Veedu</i> . Direction and music by Nagaiah.)
1953	<i>Inspector</i>	Telugu & Tamil
	<i>Gumasta</i>	Tamil & Telugu
	<i>Jatakam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Panakkari</i>	Tamil
	<i>Ulagam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Prapancham</i>	Telugu
	<i>Thuli Visham</i>	Tamil
1954	<i>Maa Gopi</i>	Telugu
	<i>Sangham</i>	Telugu & Tamil
	<i>Jataka Phalam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Ethirpaaradadu</i>	Tamil
	<i>Nanban</i>	Telugu
1954	<i>Penn</i>	Tamil
	<i>Pilla</i>	Telugu
	<i>Ladki</i>	Hindi

1954	<i>Vidudalai</i>	Tamil
1955	<i>Anarkali</i>	Telugu & Tamil
	<i>Kanavane Kankanda</i>	
	<i>Deivam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Nam Kuzhandai</i>	Tamil
1956	<i>Bhakta Markandeya</i>	Kannada (Also Tamil & Telugu versions)
	<i>Amara Deepam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Aasai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Muddubidda</i>	Telugu
	<i>Tenali Ramakrishna</i>	Telugu
	<i>Tenali Raman</i>	Tamil
	<i>Marma Veeran</i>	Tamil - a remake also appeared
	<i>Naga Panchami</i>	Telugu
	<i>Pennin Perumai</i>	Telugu (B. Narasimha Rao, a close associate of Nagaiah in his role as a music director, scored music for the last time in the film).
1957	<i>Nala Damayanti</i>	Kannada, Telugu & Tamil
	<i>Sati Savitri</i>	Telugu
	<i>Vanangamudi</i>	Tamil
	<i>Ambikapati</i>	Tamil
1958	<i>Bommala Pelli</i>	Telugu
1958	<i>Bomma Kalyanam</i>	Tamil
1958	<i>Etthuku Pai Etthu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Ganga Gowri</i>	

1958	<i>Samvadam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Adhiristam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Bomma Kalyanam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Manamalai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Sri Ramanjaneya</i>	
	<i>Yuddham</i>	Telugu
1958	<i>Nan Valartha</i>	
	<i>Thangai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Pathi Bhakti</i>	Tamil
	<i>Sampoorna</i>	
	<i>Rmayanam</i>	Tamil & Telugu
	<i>Tirumanam</i>	
	<i>Parvathi Kalyanam</i>	Telugu
1959	<i>Banda Ramudu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Jayabheri</i>	Telugu
	<i>Sipoy Koothuru</i>	Telugu
	<i>Kalai Vanan</i>	Tamil
	<i>Mala Oru Mangala</i>	
	<i>Villakku</i>	Tamil
	<i>Manaiviye</i>	
	<i>Manithanin</i>	Tamil
	<i>Manikyam</i>	
	<i>Swarna Manjari</i>	Telugu
1959	<i>Nalla Theerpu</i>	Tamil
	<i>Sahodari</i>	Tamil
	<i>Panduranga</i>	
	<i>Mahatyam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Mahisasura Mardhini</i>	Kannada
	<i>Durga Mata</i>	Hindi

1960	<i>Abhimanam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Bhakta Raghunath</i>	Telugu
	<i>Bhakta Sabari</i>	Telugu, Tamil & Kannada
	<i>Maa Babu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Rajamakutam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Samajam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Shanti Nivasam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Sri Venkateswara</i>	
	<i>Mahatyam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Rajamakudam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Thanga Ratthinam</i>	Tamil
1961	<i>Bhakta Jayadeva</i>	Telugu
	<i>Intiki Deepam Illale</i>	Telugu
	<i>Sitaramakalyanam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Vaagdanam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Anbu Magan</i>	Tamil
	<i>Ellam Unakkaga</i>	Tamil
	<i>Manappandal</i>	Tamil
	<i>Pava Mannippu</i>	Tamil
	<i>Thirudade</i>	Tamil
1962	<i>Prayaschitam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Nagarjuna</i>	Telugu
	<i>Alayamani</i>	Tamil
	<i>Dakshayagnam</i>	Tamil & Telugu
	<i>Maniyosai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Nagamalai Azahgi</i>	Tamil

1962	<i>Valar Pirai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Pacchai Villakku</i>	Tamil
	<i>Aaradhana</i>	Telugu
	<i>Swarna Manjari</i>	Telugu
1963	<i>Aatma Balam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Bandhipotu</i>	Telugu, Tamil & Kannada
	<i>Constable Koothuru</i>	Telugu
	<i>Lavakusha</i>	Telugu & Tamil
	<i>Ithu Sathiyam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Karpagam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Naanum Oru Penn</i>	Tamil
	<i>Nan Vanangum</i>	
	<i>Deivam</i>	Tamil
1964	<i>Kai Kodutha Deviam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Veerapandyan</i>	Tamil
	<i>Navagraha Pooja</i>	
	<i>Mahima</i>	Telugu
1964	<i>Aggi Pidugu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Vengai Nattu Veeran</i>	Tamil
	<i>Amara Silpi Jakkana</i>	Telugu
	<i>Amara Silpi</i>	
	<i>Jakkanacharya</i>	Kannada
	<i>Ramadasu</i>	Telugu (Direction and music also by Nagaiah)
	<i>Vivaha Bandam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Gudi Gantalu</i>	Telugu

1964	<i>Kubera Theevau</i>	Tamil
1965	<i>Thodu Needa</i>	Tamil
	<i>Santi</i>	Tamil
	<i>Mangalyame Maguva</i>	
	<i>Dhanam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Chaduvukonna</i>	
	<i>Bharya</i>	Telugu
	<i>Devata</i>	Telugu
	<i>Simhachala Kshetra</i>	
	<i>Mahima</i>	Telugu
	<i>Vishala Hrudayalu</i>	Telugu
1965	<i>Satya Harischandra</i>	Telugu
	<i>Pandava Vanavasam</i>	Telugu
1966	<i>Motor Sundaram</i>	
	<i>Pillai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Ramu</i>	Tamil
	<i>Saadu Mirandal</i>	Tamil
	<i>Saraswati Sapatham</i>	Tamil
	<i>Selvan</i>	Tamil
	<i>Aasthiparalu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Adugu Jaadalu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Navarathri</i>	Telugu
	<i>Paramanandaiah</i>	
	<i>Sishyula Katha</i>	Telugu
	<i>Shakuntala</i>	Telugu
	<i>Srimathi</i>	Telugu
	<i>Maa Annaiah</i>	Telugu

1966	<i>Konte Pilla</i>	Telugu
	<i>Parakku Paavai</i>	Tamil
1967	<i>Thangal</i>	Tamil
	<i>Bhakta Ramadas</i>	Tamil
	<i>Private Master</i>	Telugu
	<i>Iru Malargal</i>	Tamil
	<i>Kanchukota</i>	Telugu
1967	<i>Punyavati</i>	Telugu
	<i>Anumanam -</i>	
	<i>Penubhootham</i>	Telugu
	<i>Bandhipotu</i>	
	<i>Bheemanna</i>	Telugu
1967	<i>Maa Vadina</i>	Telugu
	<i>Sthree Janma</i>	Telugu
	<i>Bhakta Prahalada</i>	Telugu
1968	<i>Postman Raju</i>	Tamil
	<i>Sati Arundhati</i>	Telugu
	<i>Thikka Shankarayya</i>	Telugu
	<i>Bharya</i>	Telugu
	<i>Mana Samsaram</i>	Telugu
	<i>Nindu Samsaram</i>	Telugu
	<i>Undamma Bhotu</i>	
	<i>Peduta</i>	Telugu
	<i>Ardha Rathri</i>	Telugu
	<i>Thikka Sankarayya</i>	Telugu
1969	<i>Annaiyum Pithavaum</i>	Tamil
	<i>Manasakshi</i>	Tamil

1969	<i>Paathala Mayavi</i>	Telugu
	<i>Sri Krishnavataram</i>	Telugu
	<i>Jarigina Katha</i>	Telugu
	<i>Mooga Nomu</i>	Telugu
1969	<i>Prema Kanuka</i>	Telugu
1970	<i>Deiva Penn</i>	Tamil
	<i>Aada Janma</i>	Telugu
	<i>Ammakosam</i>	Telugu
	<i>Kodalu Diddina</i>	
	<i>Kapuram</i>	Telugu
	<i>Malli Pelli</i>	Telugu
	<i>Koteeswaradu</i>	Telugu
1971	<i>Iru Dhruvam</i>	Tamil
	<i>Kannan Karunai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Mayakkara Mohini</i>	Tamil
	<i>Maa Ilavelpu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Manasicchi Choodu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Jeevitha Chakram</i>	Telugu
1972	<i>Sri Krishanarjuna</i>	
	<i>Yuddham</i>	Telugu
	<i>Anta Mana Manchike</i>	Telugu
	<i>Inti Kodalu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Maa Inti Velugu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Md. Bin Thugalak</i>	Telugu
	<i>Neethi Nijayathi</i>	Telugu
	<i>Nijam Niroopistha</i>	Telugu

1972	<i>Sabash Baby</i>	Telugu
1972	<i>Vichitra Bandham</i>	Telugu
	<i>Vinta Dampathyalu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Ooriki Upakari</i>	Telugu
	<i>Gudaputani</i>	Telugu
1972	<i>Ganga</i>	Tamil
	<i>Jakkamma</i>	Tamil
	<i>Neethi</i>	Tamil
	<i>Raaja</i>	Tamil
	<i>Sakthi Leelalu</i>	Telugu
	<i>Amma Maata</i>	Telugu
1973	<i>Rocket Rani</i>	Tamil
	<i>Mallamma Katha</i>	Telugu
	<i>Pedda Koduku</i>	Telugu
	<i>Vishali</i>	Telugu
	<i>Thillana</i>	
	<i>Mohanambai</i>	Tamil
	<i>Mahisasura</i>	
	<i>Mardhini</i>	Kannada

Note : The above list is not complete. Nagaiah's later films in which he was seen in minor roles are far too many.

Guest Artiste :

Among a number of films in which Nagaiah has appeared in guest roles, the following are considered important :

<i>Anuragam (1963)</i>	Telugu
<i>Dagudu Muthulu (1964)</i>	Telugu

<i>Prachanda Bhairavi</i> (1965)	Telugu
<i>Private Master</i> (1967)	Telugu
<i>CID Raju</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Vinta Samsaram</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Pelli Pilupu</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Jeevitha Chakram</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Poolarangudu</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Malli Pelli</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Sri Krishna Satya</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Anuradha</i> (1971)	Telugu
<i>Muhurtha Balam</i> (1971)	Telugu

Dubbed films from Tamil to Telugu in which Nagaiah has made brief appearances :

Navarathna Kadgha Rakasyam

Papa Pariharam

Jebu Donga

Katha Nayukudu

In 1940 *Mahatma Gandhi Vazhkai* (Tamil) and *Mahatma Gandhi Jeevatam* (Telugu) A. K. Chettiar documented the life of Mahatma through library shots and graphics. Nagaiah provided music for the film. He rendered the title song " Vande Mataram " along with Kannamba.

For memorabilia : Nagaiah's voice is heard in the Sound and Light Programme on Mahatma Gandhi's life in Vijayawada's Gandhi Hall. He has rendered voice as Gandhi, while N. T. R.'s voice can be heard in a song-sequence. Shavukar Janaki's voice is collated as Kasturba Gandhi.

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- Article entitled *Kalakarudu* by V. Nagaiah.
3. *Vijayachitra* - Special No. 1967 - Pp.73.
- Article entitled Children's films by Nagaiah.
4. *Vijayachitra* Jan. 1974 - Shraddanjali - B. N. Reddi's Tribute - Pp. 73.
5. *Sviya Charitra* - by Nagaiah
6. *Anantam* by Srirangam Srinivasa Rao
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Hyderabad.

Chapter - 3 :

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2. *Nagaiah Smaraka Sanchika* - Commemorative number published by Inturi Venkateswara Rao on the occasion of

installation of Bronze Statue of Nagaiah in
Madras. 28-3-1977.Pp. 23.

3. *Sivya Charitra* . Pp. 127

4. *Vijayachitra* - Jan. 1974 Shradhanjali
Tribute by P. Pulliah

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Sahni's article.

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Aripirala Satyanarayanamoorthi. SRI KRITI
MANIMAALAI - Nootrandu Nineivu Noolu. I
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1. *Vijayachitra* - Jan. 1974 : Shraddhanjali
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1. Interviews :

Mr. V. A. K. Ranga Rao, Chennai

Mr. Dhanunjaya, Hyderabad

Mr. Balanthrapu Rajanikantha Rao, Vijayawada

— on Nagaiah's Music.

*Mr. Inturi Venkateswara Rao, senior journalist,
Madras*

*Mrs. Kamala Chandrababu, sister-in-law of
Nagaiah*

*Mr. Mohan Chandrababu, a close living relative
of Nagaiah.*

*Mr. M. Satyam, Film music Composer and a
close confident of Nagaiah*

*Mr. K. Kamalakara Kameswara Rao, film director
who worked as Asst. Director in Vauhini unit and
was closely known to Nagaiah.*

*Mr. Rehman, Mr. P. Pulliah, Mr. S. Rajeswara Rao,
were talked to, but due to their illhealth they were
not able to be of much help*

Mr. Gummadi Venkateswara Rao.

Write-ups :

Main point of reference was Nagaiah's *Sviya Charitra*, Which contained a wealth of information.

Write-ups in old issues of *Kinema*; *Vijayachitra*, *Bomma*, *Cinema Vision*, *Anasuya*, *Ananda Vikatan*, *Ananda Vani*.

Smaraka Sanchika published in commemoration of the installation of Nagaiah's statue in Panagal Park in Madras on 28th March, 1977.

Other publications consulted :

70 Years of Indian Cinema

Filminidia's *Looking Back*, 1896-1960 published by Directorate of Film Festivals.

Barnow & Krishnaswamy's *Indian Cinema*.

Baburao Patels articles.

This monograph is on the life and works of the noted Telugu actor, film-maker, music composer and singer Chittoor V. Nagaiah who dominated the formative years of south Indian cinema. Nagaiah's film career spanning about four decades saw over 300 films in Telugu, Tamil and Kannada. His name became synonymous with different Saint Poets that he portrayed on the silver screen.

The author KNT Sastry is a film critic, columnist, script writer and documentary film-maker. He has received a number of awards.



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